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Hasegawa

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(54) **IMAGE HEATING APPARATUS AND IMAGE FORMING APPARATUS**

(71) Applicant: **CANON KABUSHIKI KAISHA**, Tokyo (JP)

(72) Inventor: **Takuya Hasegawa**, Kawasaki (JP)

(73) Assignee: **Canon Kabushiki Kaisha**, Tokyo (JP)

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CPC ***G03G 15/2039*** (2013.01); ***G03G 15/2053*** (2013.01); *G03G 2215/00143* (2013.01); *G03G 2215/2019* (2013.01)

(58) **Field of Classification Search**
USPC 399/329
See application file for complete search history.

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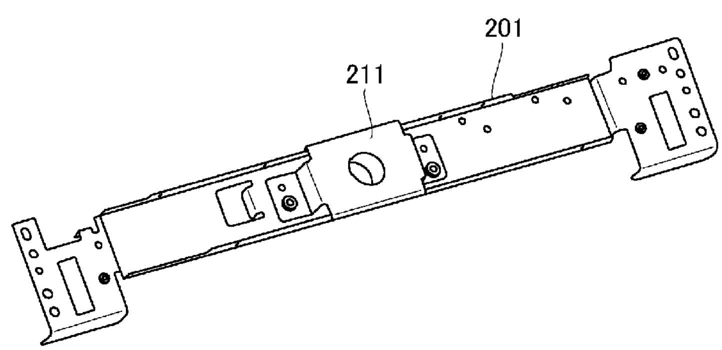
Primary Examiner — Rochelle-Ann J Blackman
Assistant Examiner — Linda B Smith
(74) *Attorney, Agent, or Firm* — Fitzpatrick, Cella, Harper & Scinto

(57) **ABSTRACT**

An image heating apparatus includes: a rotatable heating member; a belt unit including an endless belt configured to heat the rotatable heating member, and a supporting portion configured to rotatably support an inner surface of the belt; a holding portion configured to rotatably hold the belt unit; a detecting portion configured to detect that the belt is out of a predetermined zone with respect to a widthwise direction of the belt; a tilting portion configured to tilt the belt unit relative to the holding portion in a direction of causing the belt to return into the predetermined zone on the basis of an output of the detecting portion; and a limiting portion configured to limit tilting of the belt unit to an angle exceeding a predetermined angle range wider than an angle range in which the belt unit is capable of being tilted by the tilting portion.

20 Claims, 16 Drawing Sheets



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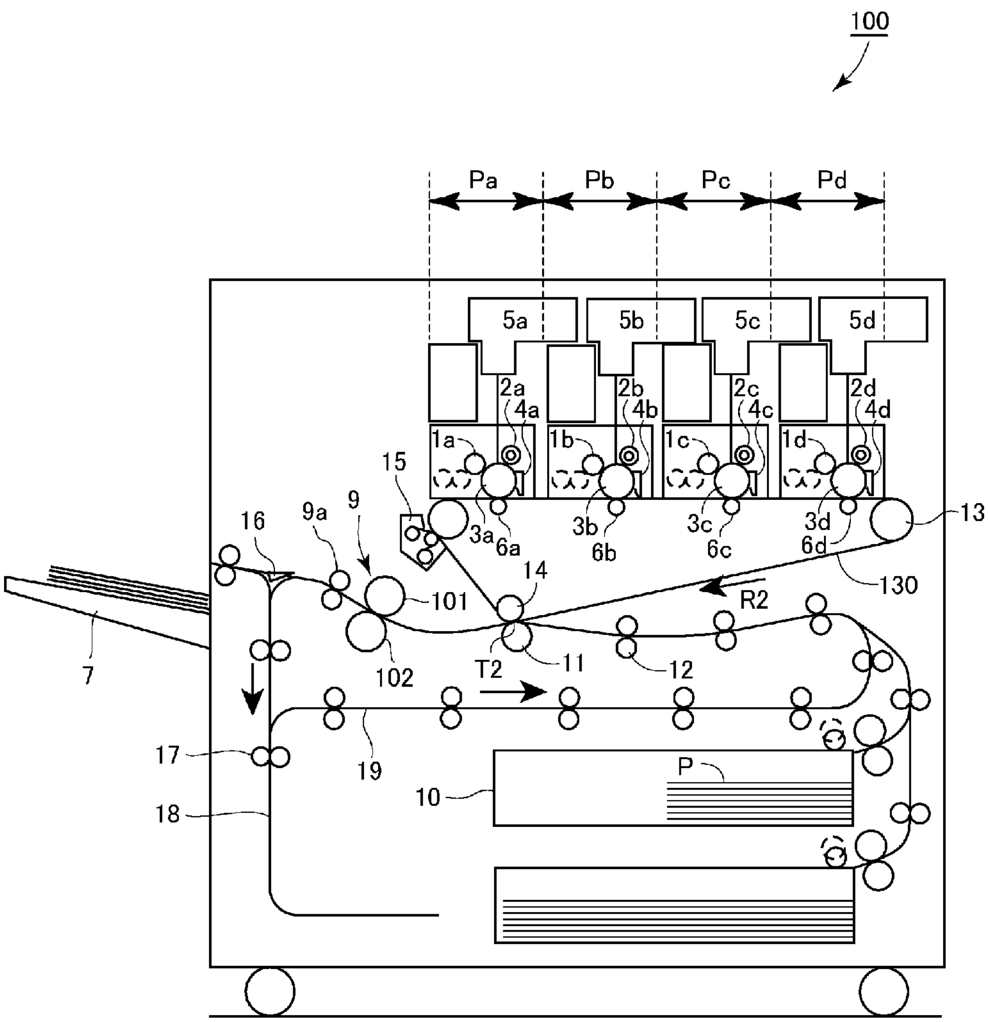
100
Pa
Pb
Pc
Pd
5a
5b
5c
5d
2a
4a
2b
4b
2c
4c
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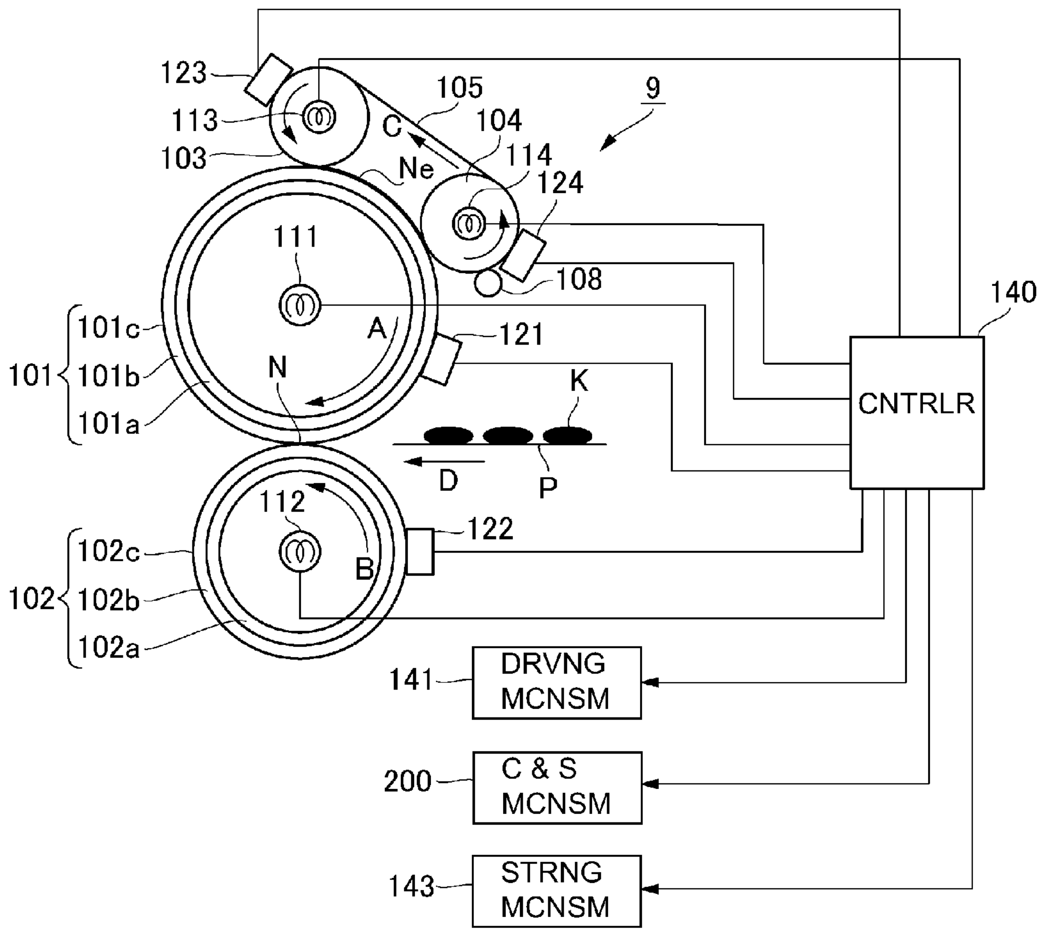
4d
1a
1b
1c
1d
3a
6a
3b
6b
3c
6c
3d
6d
15
13
130
16
9a
9
14
R2
101
102
11
12
T2
7
17
19
P
10
18

Fig. 1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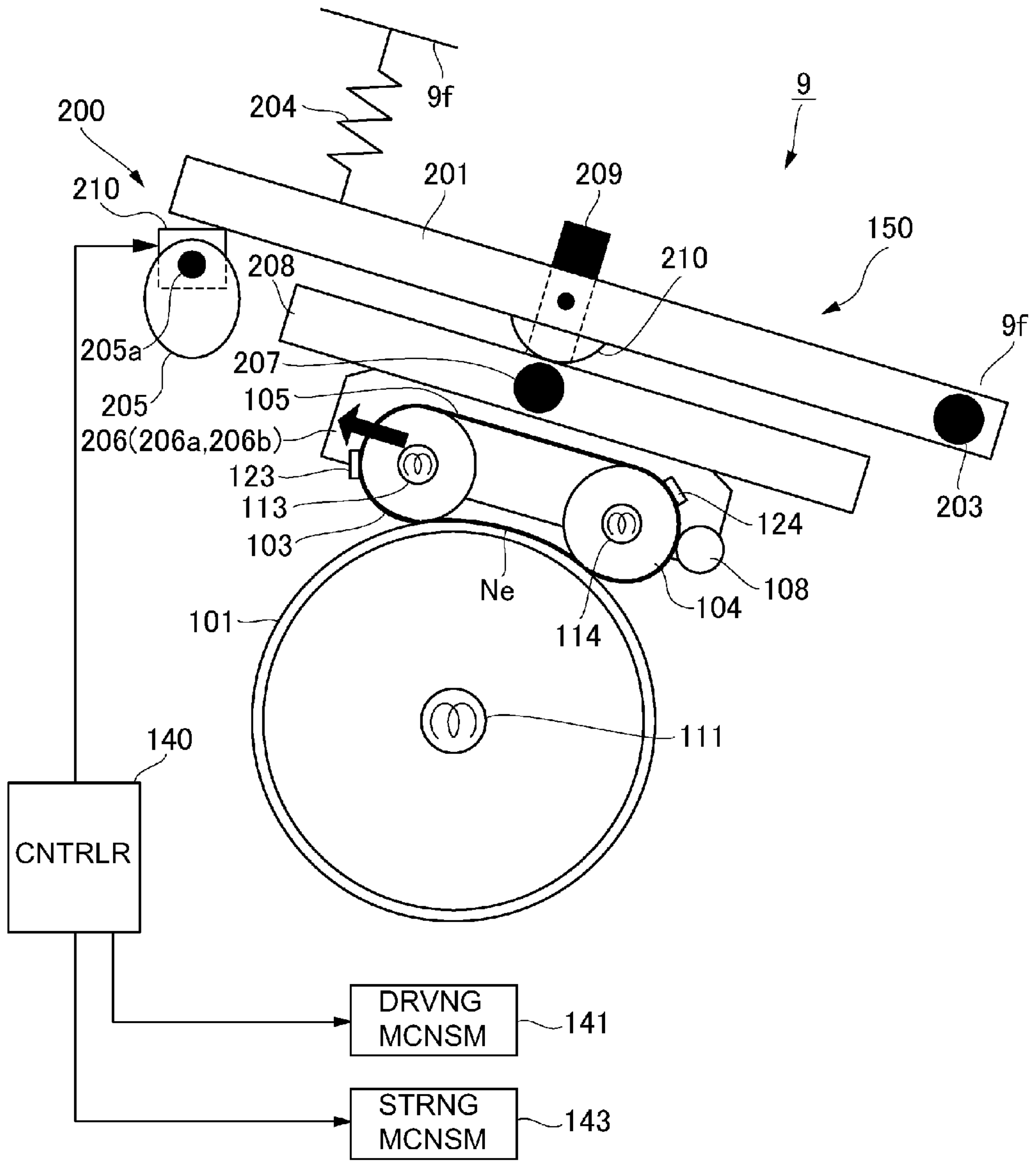
123
113
103
105
C
104
114
Ne
124
111
108
140
101c
101
101b
101a
A
121
N
K
CNTRLR
D
P
112
122
102c
102
102b
102a
B
141
DRVNG MCNSM
200
C & S MCNSM
143
STRNG MCNSM

Fig. 2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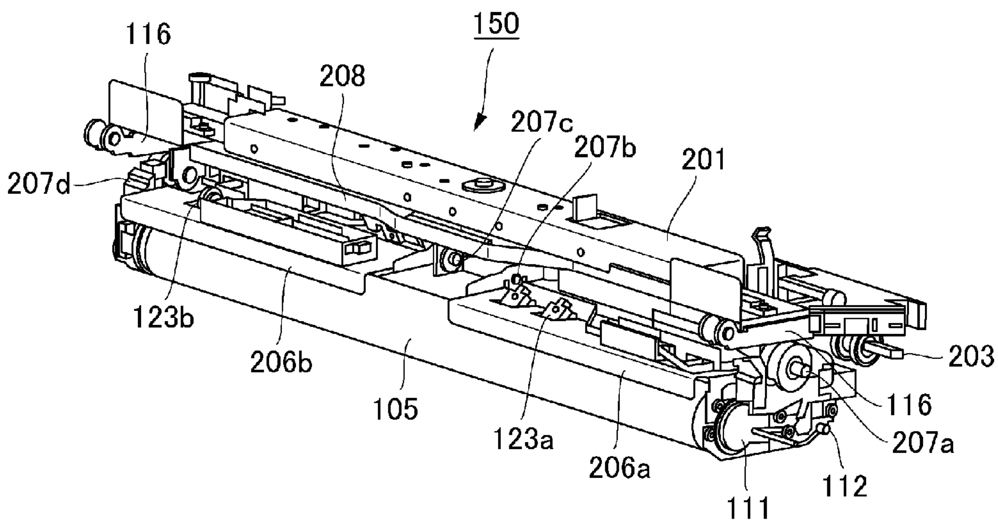
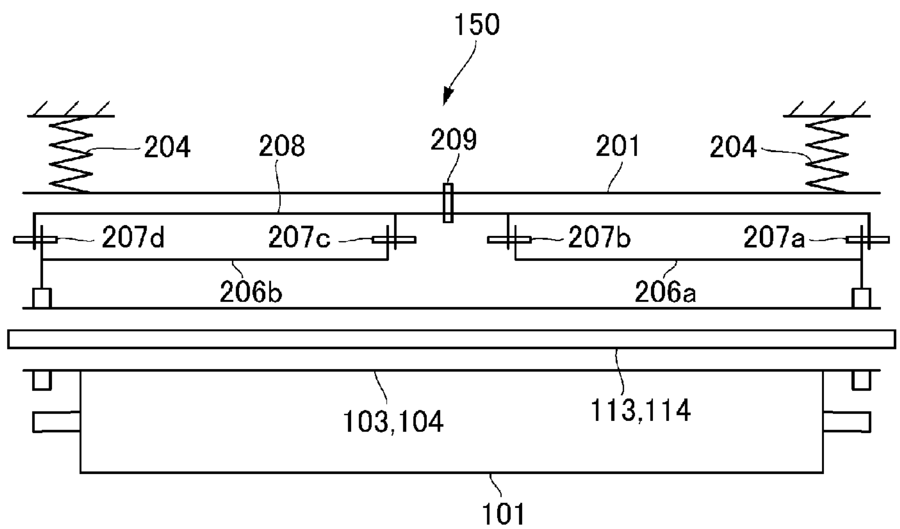
204
9f
9
210
201
209
150
208
210
205a
9f
207
205
105
206(206a,206b)
123
113
124
103
108
Ne
104
101
114
111
140
CNTRLR
DRVNG
MCNSM
141
STRNG
MCNSM
143

Fig. 3

(a)


150
116
208
207c
207b
201
207d
123b
206b
105
123a
206a
111
112
207a
116
203

(b)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204
208
209
201
204
207d
207c
207b
207a
206b
206a
103,104
113,114
101

Fig. 4

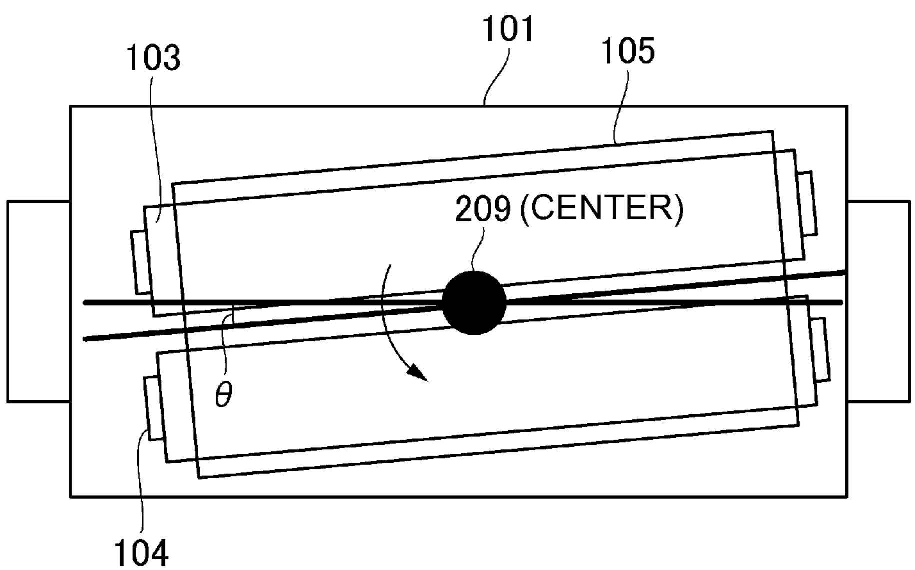


Fig. 5

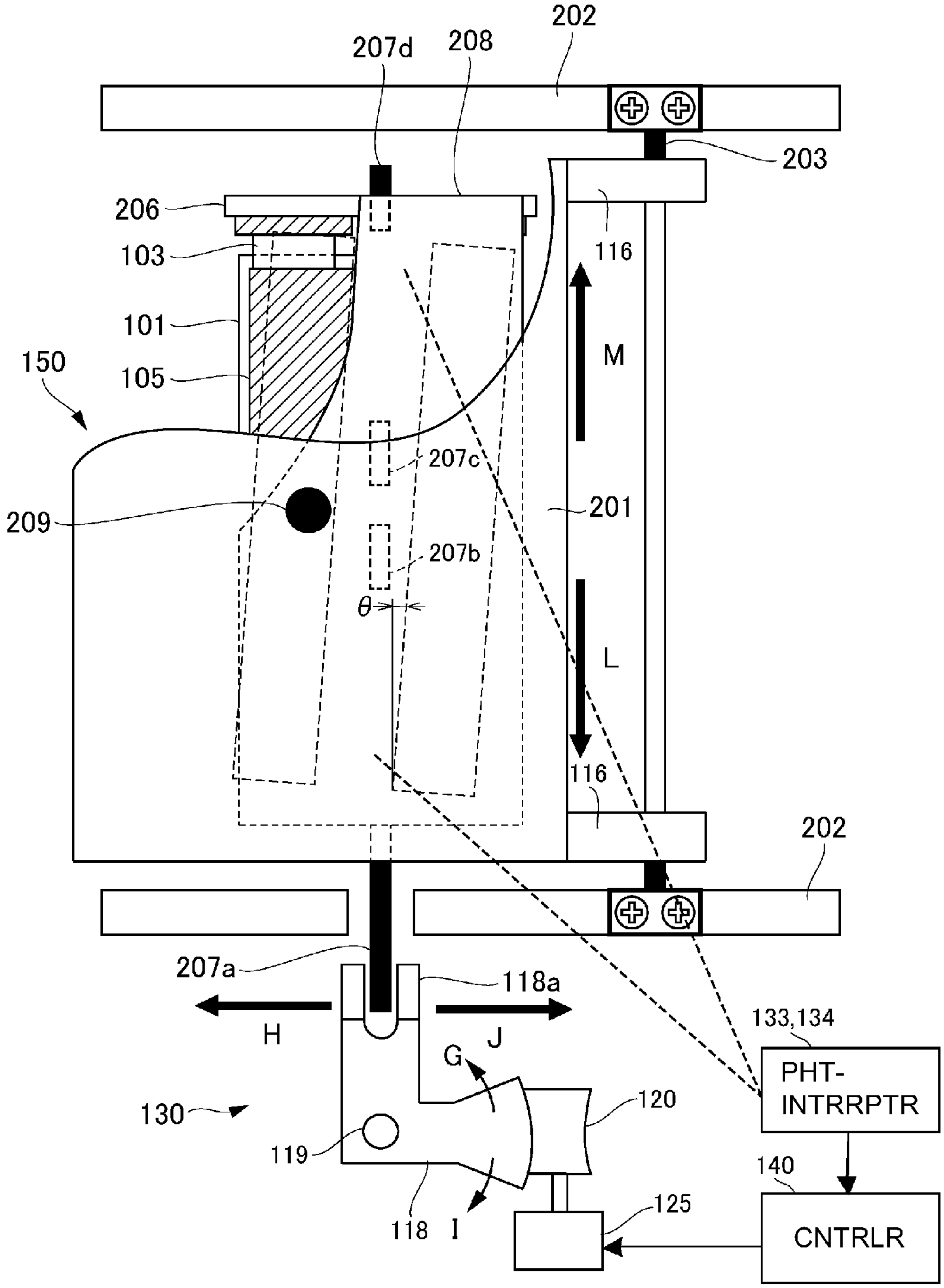
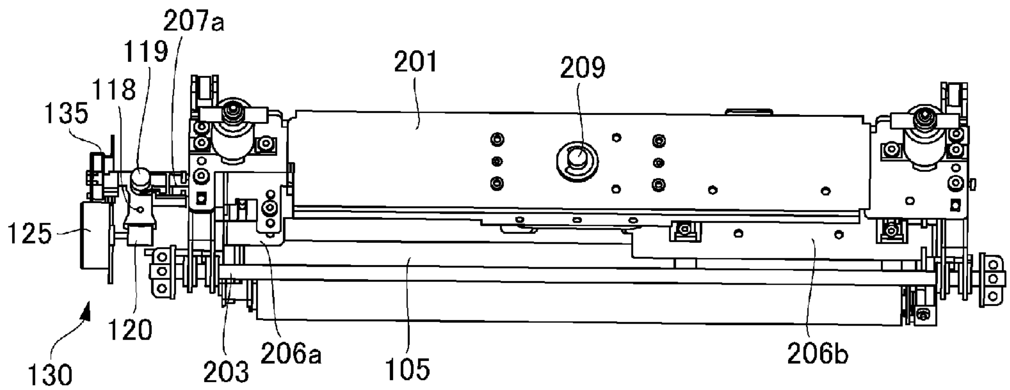

202
207d
208
203
206
103
116
101
M
150
105
207c
209
201
207b
θ
L
116
202
207a
118a
H
J
133,134
G
PHT-
INTRRPTR
130
120
119
140
125
118
I
CNTRLR

Fig. 6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119
118
135
125
120
130
201
209
203
206a
105
206b

Fig. 7

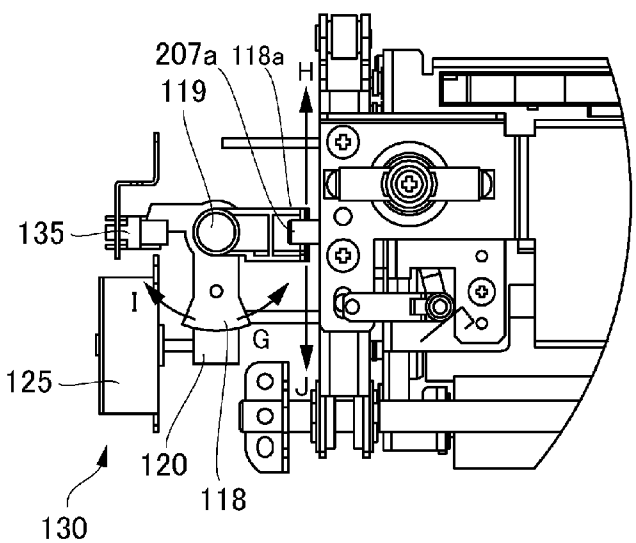

207a
118a
H
119
135
I
G
125
J
120
118
130

Fig. 8

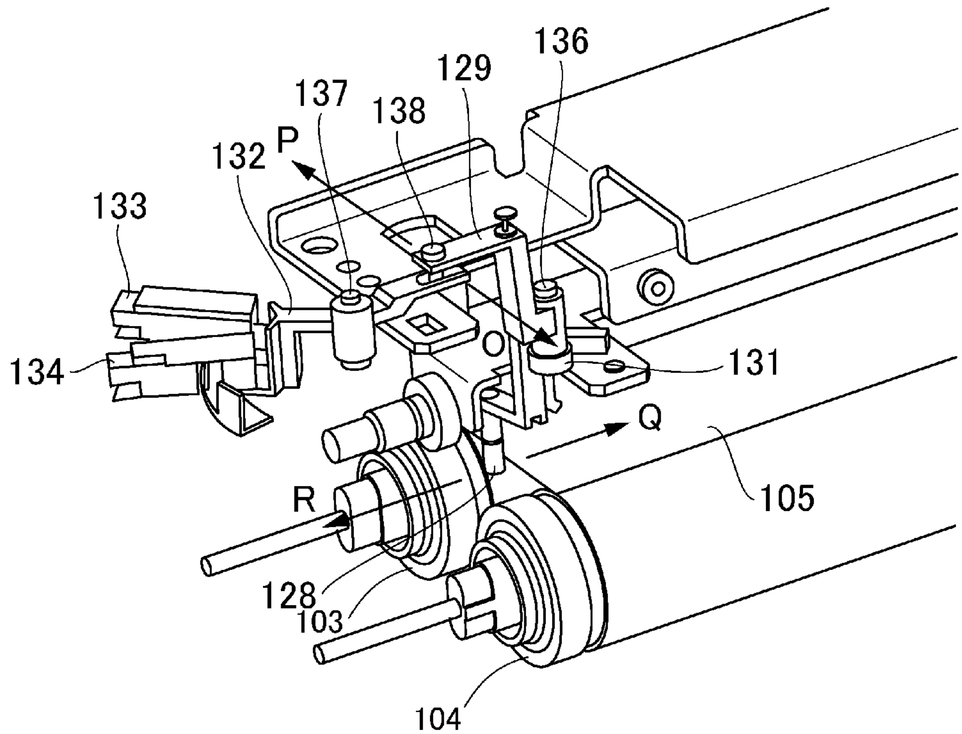
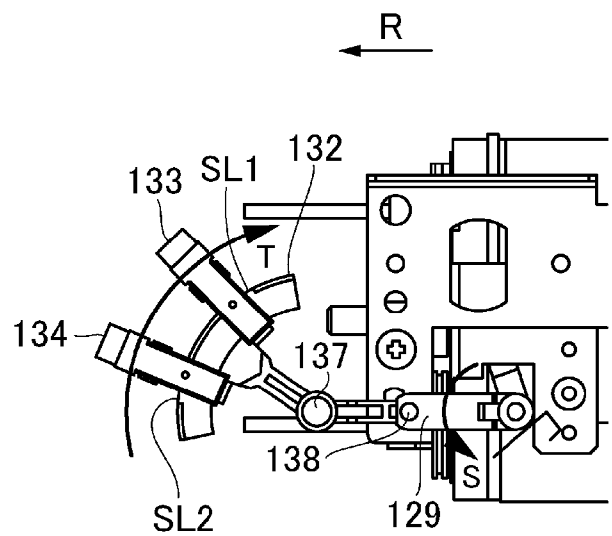


Fig. 9

(a)



(b)

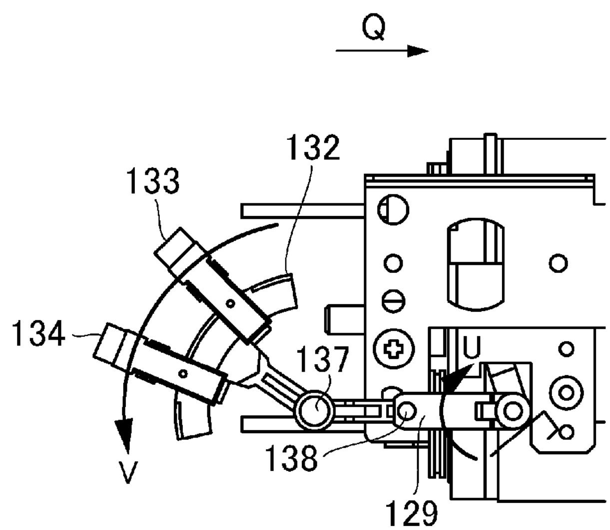
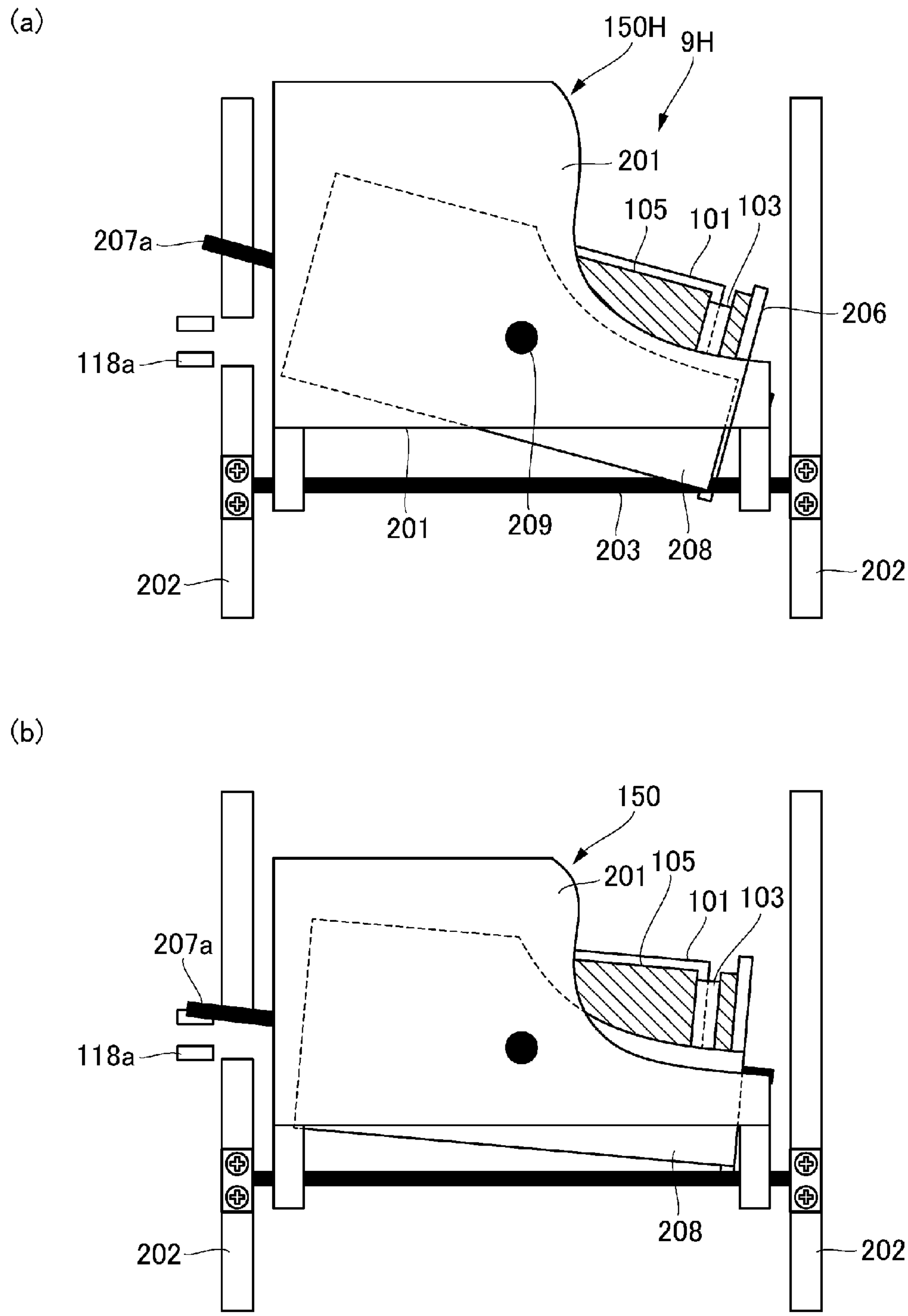


Fig. 10


(a)
150H
9H
201
105
101
103
207a
206
118a
201
209
203
208
202
202
(b)
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101
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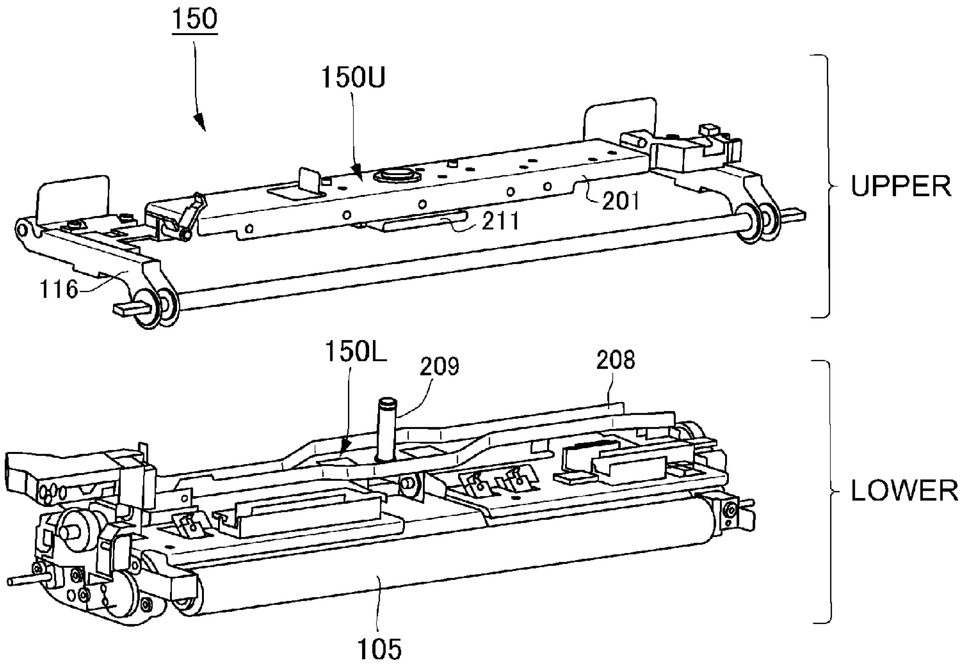
207a
118a
208
202
202

Fig. 11



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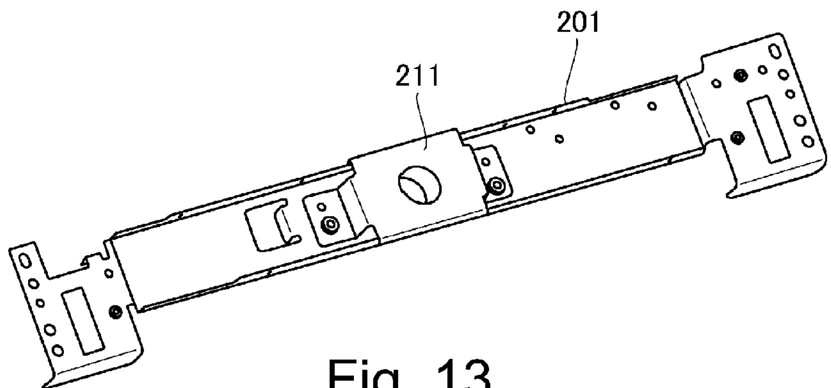


Fig. 13

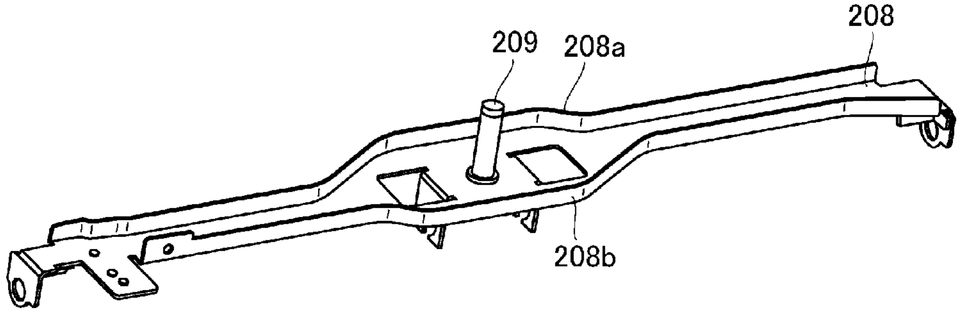


Fig. 14

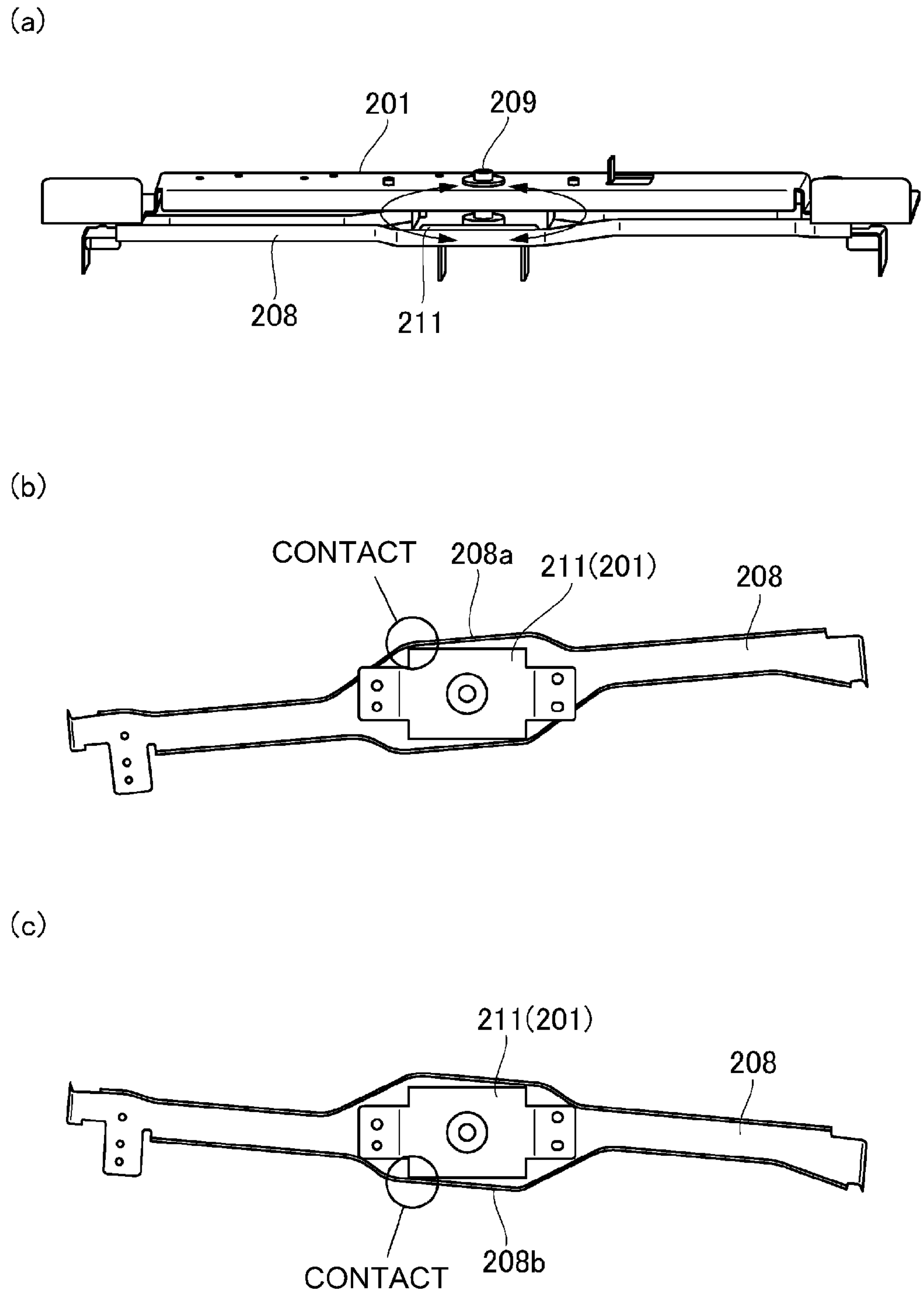

(a)
201
209
208
211
(b)
CONTACT
208a
211(201)
208
(c)
211(201)
208
CONTACT
208b

Fig. 15

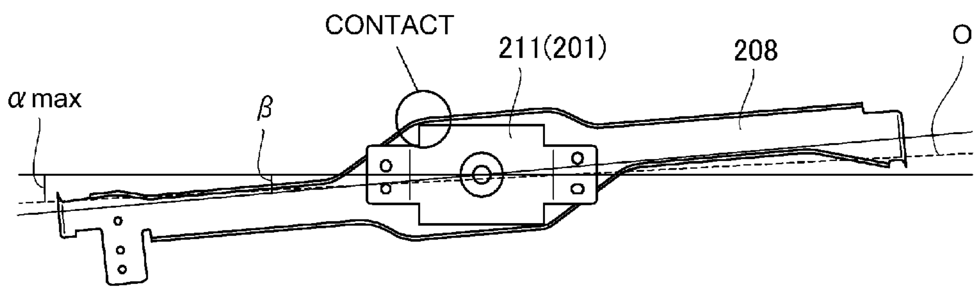
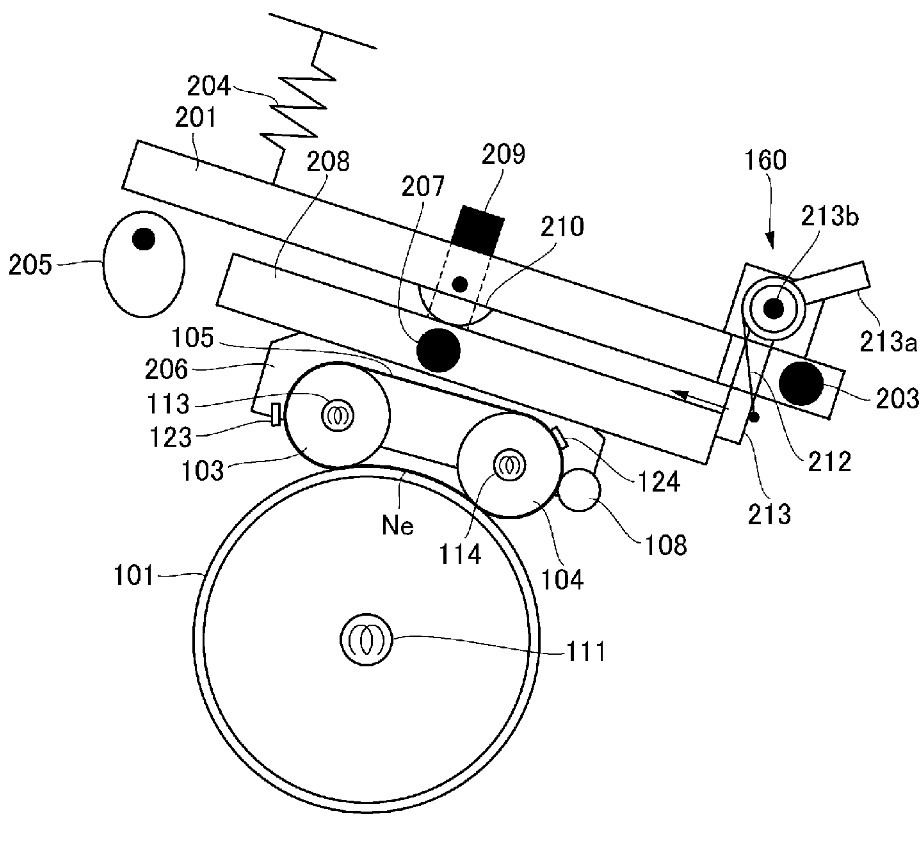

CONTACT
211(201)
208
O
α max
β

Fig. 16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201
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207
210
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213b
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213a
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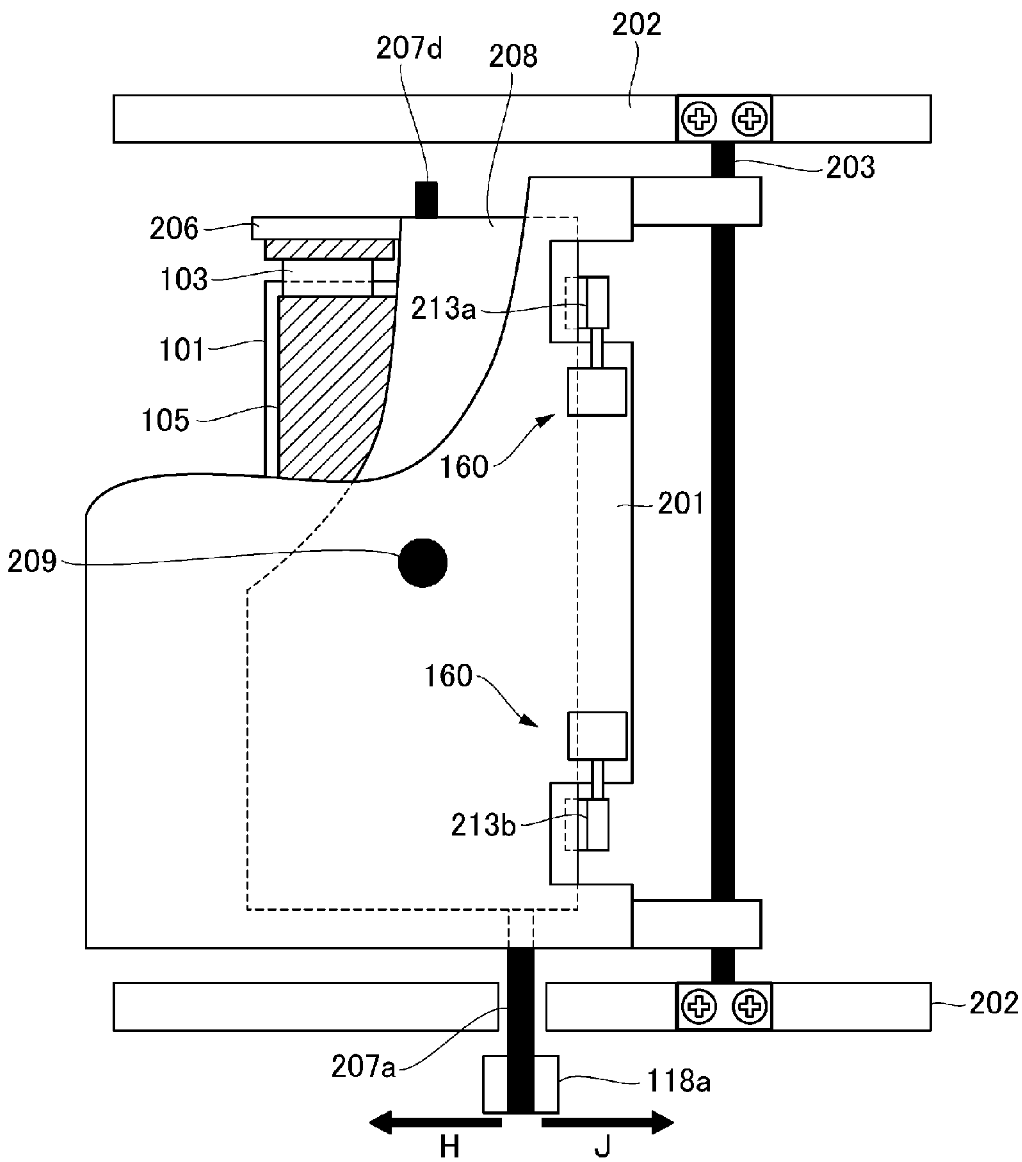
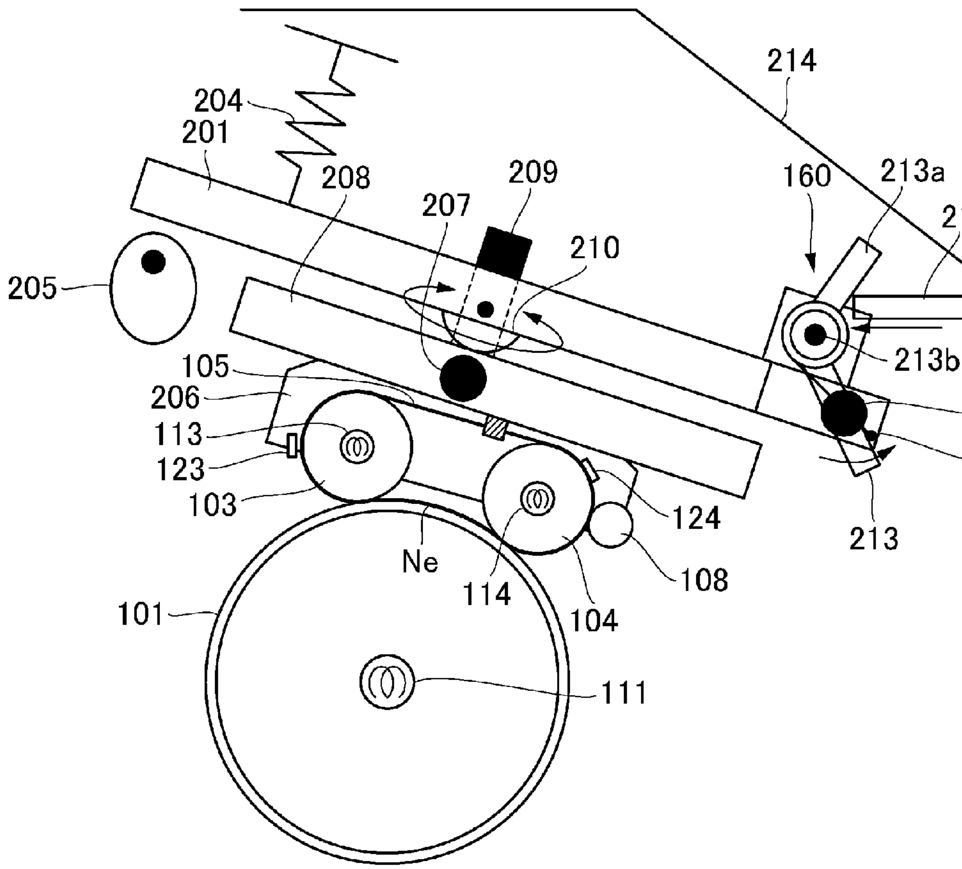
206
203
113
123
212
124
103
213
Ne
108
114
104
101
111

Fig. 17



202
207d
208
203
206
103
213a
101
105
160
201
209
160
213b
202
207a
118a
H
J

Fig. 18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213a
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213b
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203
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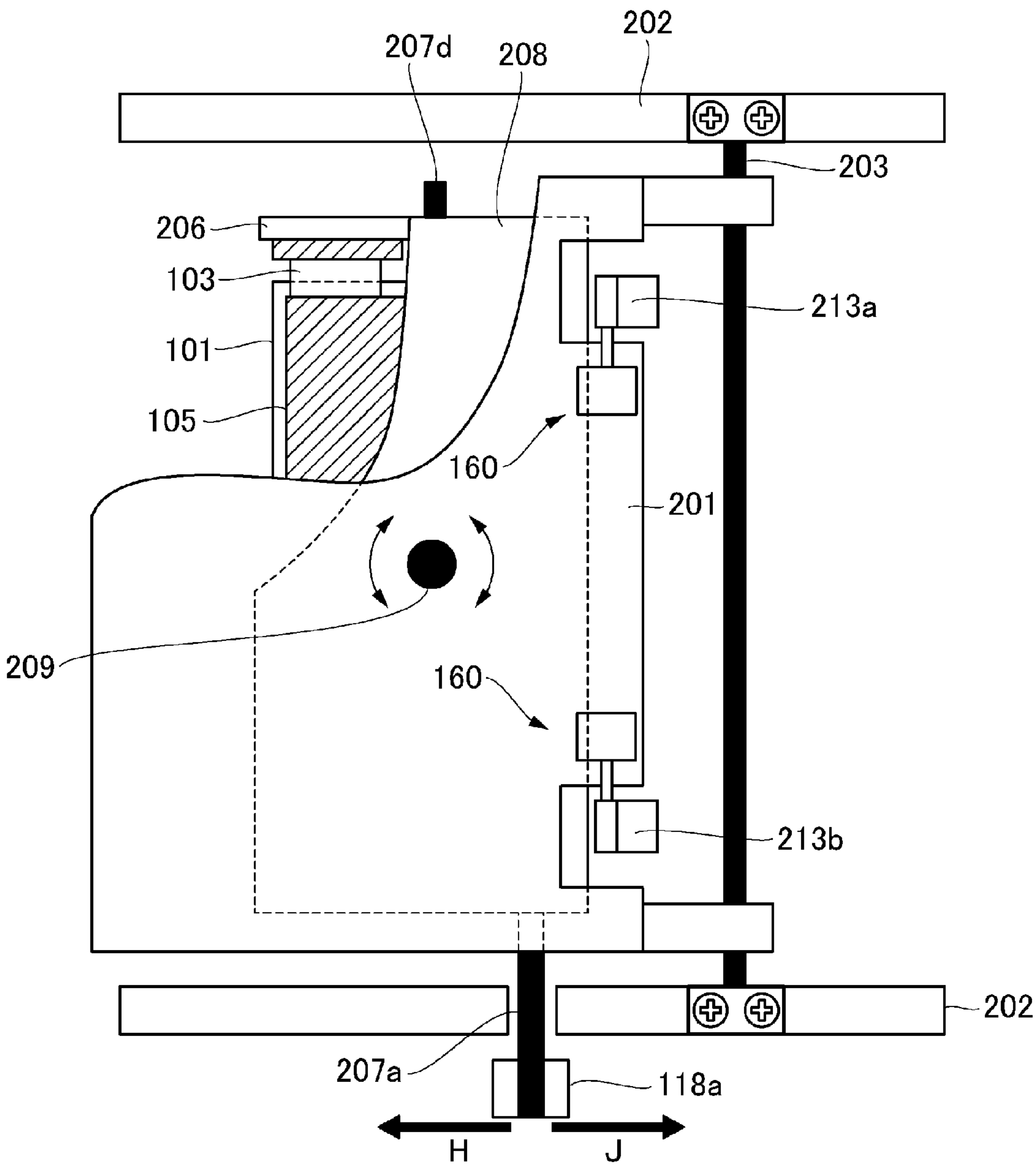
123
212
103
124
213
Ne
114
108
104
101
111

Fig. 19


202
207d
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203
206
103
101
105
213a
160
201
209
160
213b
202
207a
118a
H
J

Fig. 20

IMAGE HEATING APPARATUS AND IMAGE FORMING APPARATUS

FIELD OF THE INVENTION AND RELATED ART

The present invention relates to an image forming apparatus such as a printer, a copying machine, a facsimile machine or a multi-function machine having a plurality of functions of these machines, and relates to an image heating apparatus usable in such an image forming apparatus.

Various image forming apparatuses have been conventionally known, but those of the electrophotographic type have come into wide use. Such image forming apparatuses are required to provide high productivity (the print number per unit time) with respect to various sheets (recording materials) such as thick paper.

Incidentally, in the image forming apparatus of the electrophotographic type as described above, particularly in order to improve the productivity with respect to the thick paper having a large basis weight, speed-up of a fixing speed of a fixing device or apparatus (image heating apparatus) is required. However, in the case of the thick paper, compared with the case of thin paper, heat in a large amount is taken from the fixing device with sheet passing, and therefore a heat quantity required for fixing becomes large. For that reason, in the case of the thick paper, a coping method in which the productivity is lowered (by decreasing the fixing speed or the print number per unit time) has been known.

As a coping method in which the productivity is not lowered with respect to the thick paper, an externally heating type (method) in which a member is contacted to an outer surface of a fixing roller (rotatable heating member) to maintain an outer surface temperature of the fixing roller has been devised. As such an externally heating type, in order to improve a fixing roller temperature maintaining performance by remarkably increasing a contact area with the fixing roller, use of an externally heating belt (endless belt) rotatably stretched by two supporting rollers has been proposed (Japanese Laid-Open Patent Application (JP-A) 2007-212896).

However, it is actually difficult to assemble the externally heating belt with the two supporting rollers with high accuracy of parallelism between the two supporting rollers and to maintain the parallelism with high accuracy. As a result, when the parallelism between the two supporting rollers is not ensured, the externally heating belt is shifted in a widthwise direction thereof, so that there is a fear that travelling stability of the externally heating belt becomes worse.

Therefore, with respect to such a fear, it would be considered that a method in which the (lateral) shift of the externally heating belt is controlled by inclining one of the supporting rollers with respect to the other supporting roller is used, but in the case of the externally heating belt performing a function of heating the fixing roller, it is difficult to employ this method.

This is because in the cases of this method, a constitution in which an end side of one of the supporting roller with respect to an axial direction is displaced with respect to another end side of the one of the supporting rollers is employed, but there is a fear that a part of a region where the externally heating belt is to be contacted to the fixing roller is separated (spaced) from the fixing roller by displacement of this one of the supporting roller. As a result, a function of the externally heating belt for heating the fixing roller is impaired, so that improper fixing is invited.

SUMMARY OF THE INVENTION

A principal object of the present invention is to provide an image heating apparatus capable of improving traveling stability of an endless belt.

Another object of the present invention is to provide an image forming apparatus capable of improving the traveling stability of the endless belt.

According to an aspect of the present invention, there is provided an image heating apparatus comprising: a rotatable heating member configured to heat an image on a sheet; a belt unit including an endless belt configured to heat the rotatable heating member in contact with an outer surface of the rotatable heating member, and a supporting portion configured to rotatably support an inner surface of the endless belt; a holding portion configured to rotatably hold the belt unit; a detecting portion configured to detect that the endless belt is out of a predetermined zone with respect to a widthwise direction of the endless belt; a tilting portion configured to tilt the belt unit relative to the holding portion in a direction of causing the endless belt to return into the predetermined zone on the basis of an output of the detecting portion; and a limiting portion configured to limit tilting of the belt unit to an angle exceeding a predetermined angle range wider than an angle range in which the belt unit is capable of being tilted by the tilting portion.

According to another aspect of the present invention, there is provided an image forming apparatus comprising: a belt unit including an endless belt and a supporting portion configured to rotatably support an inner surface of the endless belt; a rotatable driving member configured to rotate the endless belt by rotation thereof in contact with an outer surface of the endless belt; a holding portion configured to rotatably hold the belt unit; a detecting portion configured to detect that the endless belt is out of a predetermined zone with respect to a widthwise direction of the endless belt; a tilting portion configured to tilt the belt unit relative to the holding portion in a direction of causing the endless belt to return into the predetermined zone on the basis of an output of the detecting portion; and a limiting portion configured to limit tilting of the belt unit to an angle exceeding a predetermined angle range wider than an angle range in which the belt unit is capable of being tilted by the tilting portion.

These and other objects, features and advantages of the present invention will become more apparent upon a consideration of the following description of the preferred embodiments of the present invention taken in conjunction with the accompanying drawings.

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE DRAWINGS

FIG. **1** is an illustration of a structure of an image forming apparatus.

FIG. **2** is an illustration of a structure of a fixing device (apparatus) in Embodiment 1.

FIG. **3** is an illustration of a structure of a contact and separation mechanism for an externally heating belt.

Parts (a) and (b) of FIG. **4** are a perspective view and a mechanism view, respectively, of an externally heating unit.

FIG. **5** is an illustration of a crossing angle between a fixing roller and the externally heating belt.

FIG. **6** is an illustration of a steering mechanism for the externally heating belt.

FIG. **7** is an illustration of a driving portion of the steering mechanism.

FIG. **8** is an enlarged view of the driving portion of the steering mechanism.

FIG. **9** is an illustration of an arrangement of a belt position sensor.

Part (a) of FIG. **10** is an illustration of a relationship between a belt lateral deviation direction and a rotational direction of a sensor flag in the case where the belt is shifted in a longitudinal front side, and (b) of FIG. **10** is an illustration of the relationship between the belt lateral deviation direction and the rotational direction of the sensor flag in the case where the belt is shifted in a longitudinal rear side.

Part (a) of FIG. **11** is an illustration of rotation of a swingable frame in a fixing device in Comparison example, and (b) of FIG. **11** is an illustration of rotation of a swingable frame in the fixing device in Embodiment 1.

FIG. **12** is an illustration of a structure of an externally heating unit.

FIG. **13** is an illustration of a structure of a pressing frame.

FIG. **14** is an illustration of a structure of the swingable frame.

Parts (a), (b) and (c) of FIG. **15** are illustrations of tilt (rotation) limitation of the swingable frame.

FIG. **16** is an illustration of a relationship between a crossing angle and tilt limit angle.

FIG. **17** is a front view of a demounted state of an externally heating unit in Embodiment 2.

FIG. **18** is a plan view of the demounted state of the externally heating unit in Embodiment 2.

FIG. **19** is a front view of a mounted state of the externally heating unit in Embodiment 2.

FIG. **20** is a plan view of the mounted state of the externally heating unit in Embodiment 2.

DESCRIPTION OF THE PREFERRED EMBODIMENTS

Embodiments of the present invention will be specifically described below with reference to the drawings.

(Embodiment 1)

<Image Forming Apparatus>

FIG. **1** is an illustration of a structure of an image forming apparatus **100**. As shown in FIG. **1**, the image forming apparatus **100** is a tandem-type full-color printer of an intermediary transfer type in which image forming portions Pa, Pb, Pc and Pd for yellow, magenta, cyan and black, respectively are arranged along an intermediary transfer belt **130**.

In the image forming portion Pa, a yellow toner image is formed on a photosensitive drum **3***a*, and then is primary-transferred onto the intermediary transfer belt **130**. In the image forming portion Pb, a magenta toner image is formed on a photosensitive drum **3***b*, and then is primary-transferred onto the intermediary transfer belt **130**. In the image forming portions Pc and Pd, a cyan toner image and a black toner image are formed on photosensitive drums **3***c* and **3***d*, respectively, and then are primary-transferred successively onto the intermediary transfer belt **130**.

A recording material P is taken out from a recording material cassette **10** one by one by and is in stand-by between registration rollers **12**. The recording material P is sent by the registration rollers **12** to a secondary transfer portion T**2** while being timed to the toner images on the intermediary transfer belt **130**. The recording material P on which the four color toner images are secondary-transferred from the intermediary transfer belt **130** while being conveyed through the secondary transfer portion T**2** is conveyed into a fixing device (apparatus) **9** and then is heated and pressed by the fixing device **9** to fix the toner images thereon. Thereafter, the recording material P is discharged onto a tray **7** outside the image forming apparatus.

The image forming portions Pa, Pb, Pc and Pd have the substantially same constitution except that the colors of toners of yellow, magenta, cyan and black used in developing devices **1***a*, **1***b*, **1***c* and **1***d* are different from each other. In the following description, the image forming portion Pa will be described and other image forming portions Pb, Pc and Pd will be omitted from redundant description.

The image forming portion Pa includes the photosensitive drum **3***a* around which a charging roller **2***a*, an exposure device **5***a*, the developing device **1***a*, a primary transfer roller **6***a*, and a drum cleaning device **4***a* are provided. The photosensitive drum **3***a* is prepared by forming a photosensitive layer on the surface of an aluminum cylinder. The charging roller **2***a* electrically charges the surface of the photosensitive drum **3***a* to a uniform potential. The exposure device **5***a* writes (forms) an electrostatic image for an image on the photosensitive drum **3***a* by scanning with a laser beam. The developing device **1***a* develops the electrostatic image to form the toner image on the photosensitive drum **3***a*. The primary transfer roller **6***a* is supplied with a voltage, so that the toner image on the photosensitive drum **3***a* is primary-transferred onto the intermediary transfer belt **130**.

The drum cleaning device **4***a* rubs the photosensitive drum **3***a* with a cleaning blade to collect a transfer residual toner deposited on the photosensitive drum **3***a* without being transferred onto the intermediary transfer belt **130**. A belt cleaning **15** collects a transfer residual toner deposited on the intermediary transfer belt **130** without being transferred onto the recording material P at the secondary transfer portion T**2**.

(Fixing Device)

FIG. **2** is an illustration of a structure of fixing device functioning as an image heating apparatus.

As shown in FIG. **2**, in the fixing device **9**, a nip N is formed by causing a pressing roller **102** to press-contact a fixing roller **101** functioning as a rotatable heating member. At the nip N, while nip-conveying the recording material (sheet) P on which an unfixed toner K is carried is nipped and conveyed, an image is fixed on the recording material P by melting the unfixed toner on the recording material P.

The fixing roller **101** includes a core metal **101***a* and an elastic layer **101***b* formed on an outer peripheral surface of the core metal **101***a*, and a surface of the elastic layer **101***b* is coated with a parting layer **101***c*. The fixing roller **101** is rotationally driven by a driving mechanism **141** including an unshown gear train, thus being rotated in an arrow A direction at 300 mm/sec.

The pressing roller **102** includes a core metal **102***a* and an elastic layer **102***b* formed on an outer peripheral surface of the core metal **102***a*, and a surface of the elastic layer **102***b* is coated with a parting layer **102***c*. The pressing roller **102** is rotationally driven by the driving mechanism **141**, thus being rotated in an arrow B direction. The pressing roller **102** is driven by an unshown pressing mechanism using an eccentric cam and is movable toward and away from the fixing roller **101**. The unshown pressing mechanism presses the pressing roller **102** at predetermined pressure against the fixing roller **101**, so that the nip N is formed between the fixing roller **101** and the pressing roller **102**.

A halogen heater **111** as a heating mechanism is provided non-rotatably inside the core metal **101***a* of the fixing roller **101**. A thermistor **121** is provided in contact with the fixing roller **101** to detect a surface temperature of the fixing roller **101**. A controller **140** effects ON/OFF control of the halogen heater **111** depending on a detected temperature by the thermistor **121**, thus maintaining the surface temperature of the fixing roller **101** at a predetermined target temperature depending on the type of the recording material P.

A halogen heater **112** is provided non-rotatably inside the core metal **102***a* of the pressing roller **102**. A thermistor **122** is provided in contact with the pressing roller **102** to detect a surface temperature of the pressing roller **102**. The controller **140** effects ON/OFF control of the halogen heater **112** depending on a detected temperature by the thermistor **122**, thus maintaining the surface temperature of the pressing roller **102** at the predetermined target temperature.

(Externally Heating Belt)

Recently, the image forming apparatus **100** is required to output an image with high productivity (the print number per unit time) even with respect to the recording material such as thick paper having a large basis weight (weight per unit area). In order to improve the productivity with respect to the recording material having the large basis weight, it is preferable that speed-up of heating by the fixing device **9** is adhered. However, the recording material having the larger basis weight takes heat in a larger amount, and therefore a heat quantity required for fixing is remarkably large compared with a recording material having a small basis weight.

Therefore, in the fixing device **9** in this embodiment, an externally heating belt **105** which is an endless belt as an externally heating mechanism is used. Specifically, a constitution in which an outer surface temperature is maintained by heating an outer surface (outer portion) of the fixing roller **101** by the externally heating belt **105** is employed.

Incidentally, the externally heating belt **105** has a constitution in which the externally heating belt **105** is movable toward and away from the fixing roller **101** as described later. Further, the externally heating belt **105** has a constitution in which an inner surface thereof is rotatably supported by a plurality of rollers functioning as a supporting portion, i.e., an upstream roller **103** and a downstream roller **104**. As a result, an area of contact of the externally heating belt **105** with the fixing roller **101** (i.e., an area of a portion capable of effecting thermal conduction) is increased, so that a function of compensating for the outer surface temperature of the fixing roller **101** is enhanced.

The fixing device **9** is stand-by for a subsequent image forming job (print command) in a state in which the externally heating belt **105** is spaced (separated) from the fixing roller **101**. When the image forming job is sent to the image forming apparatus **100**, preparatory operations are started in respective devices in the image forming apparatus **100**, and a preparatory operation, i.e., a heating operation (warm-up operation) is started also in the fixing device **9**. In the heating operation, when temperatures of the fixing roller **101**, the pressing roller **102**, the upstream roller **103** and the downstream roller **104** reach target temperatures, respectively, the image forming job is started by bringing the externally heating belt **105** into press-contact with the fixing roller **101**. Thereafter, when the image forming job is ended, the externally heating belt **105** is spaced from the fixing roller **101** and then is held in this state until the time when subsequent image formation is started.

The externally heating belt **105** is used for externally heating the fixing roller **101** by being contacted to the outer peripheral surface of the fixing roller **101** to form a nip (heating portion) Ne. The externally heating belt **105** includes a base layer of metal such as stainless steel or nickel or of a resin material such as polyimide. A surface of the base layer is coated with a heat-resistant slidable layer using a fluorine-containing resin material in order to prevent deposition of the toner. The externally heating belt **105** is rotated in an arrow contact direction by the rotation of the fixing roller **101**.

The upstream roller **103** (supporting roller) is formed of metal, such as aluminum, iron or stainless steel, having high thermal conductivity. A halogen heater **113** is penetrated through the center of the upstream roller **103** and is disposed non-rotatably. A thermistor **123** detects a temperature of the upstream roller **103** in contact with the externally heating belt **105** supported by the upstream roller **103**. The controller **140** effects ON/OFF control of the halogen heater **113** depending on a detected temperature by the thermistor **123**, thus keeping the temperature of the upstream roller **103** at a predetermined target temperature.

The downstream roller **104** (supporting roller) is formed of metal, such as aluminum, iron or stainless steel, having high thermal conductivity. A halogen heater **114** is penetrated through the center of the downstream roller **104** and is disposed non-rotatably. A thermistor **124** detects a temperature of the downstream roller **104** in contact with the externally heating belt **105** supported by the downstream roller **104**. The controller **140** effects ON/OFF control of the halogen heater **114** depending on a detected temperature by the thermistor **124**, thus keeping the temperature of the downstream roller **104** at a predetermined target temperature.

The target temperature for temperature adjustment of the upstream roller **103** and the downstream roller **104** is set at a value higher than the target temperature for temperature adjustment of the fixing roller **101**. This is because when the surface of the upstream roller **103** and the downstream roller **104** is kept at a value higher than the surface temperature of the fixing roller **101**, heat can be efficiently supplied to the fixing roller **101** lowered in surface temperature. During continuous image formation with respect to thick paper, compared with the target temperature of the fixing roller **101** set at 165° C., the target temperature of the upstream roller **103** and the downstream roller **104** is set at 230° C. Thus, the surface temperature of the upstream roller **103** and the downstream roller **104** is kept at a value higher than the surface temperature of the fixing roller **101** by 75° C.

There is a fear that a surface layer of the externally heating belt **105** is contaminated by deposition of a foreign matter, such as the toner or paper powder, transferred (offset) from the recording material. Therefore, a cleaning roller **108** is provided, and the foreign matter, such as the toner or the paper powder, deposited on the belt **105** is adsorbed by a silicone rubber layer provided on a surface of the cleaning roller **108**. The cleaning roller **108** is urged at predetermined pressure by the externally heating belt **105** while being rotated by rotation of the externally heating belt **105**, thus cleaning the surface of the externally heating belt **105**.

(Roller Supporting Mechanism)

FIG. **3** is an illustration of a contact and separation mechanism for the externally heating belt. Parts (a) and (b) of FIG. **4** are a perspective view of an outer appearance and a mechanism view, respectively, of the externally heating unit. FIG. **5** is an illustration of a crossing angle between the fixing roller and the externally heating belt.

As shown in FIG. **3**, an externally heating unit **150** is extended by the two rollers, i.e., the upstream roller **103** and the downstream roller **104**, thus being stretched in a state in which predetermined tension is applied thereto. The externally heating belt **105** is rotatably supported by the upstream roller **103** and the downstream roller **104** so as to be rotated by rotation of the fixing roller **101**.

The externally heating belt **105** is movable toward away from the fixing roller **101** by the contact and separation mechanism **200**. The contact and separation mechanism **200** also functions as a press-contact mechanism for causing the upstream roller **103** and the downstream roller **104** to press-contact the externally heating belt **105** against the fixing roller **101**. A pressing frame **201** is rotatable about a supporting shaft (axis) **203** relative to a casing frame **9***f* of the fixing device **9**. Between a rotation end portion of the pressing frame **201** and the casing frame **9***f* of the fixing device **9**, a pressing spring **204** is provided. The pressing spring **204** presses down the rotation end portion of the pressing frame **201** to urge a swinging frame **208** toward the fixing roller **101**. The swinging frame **208** is rotatably supported relative to the pressing frame **201**, by a pair of intermediate rollers **210** provided in front and rear sides of the pressing frame **201**. In a state in which the upstream roller **103** and the downstream roller **104** are press-contacted to the externally heating belt **105** against the fixing roller **101**, the pressing spring **204** presses the upstream roller **103** and the downstream roller **104** at total pressure of 392 N (about 40 kgf).

A pressure-releasing cam **205** contacts a lower surface of the rotation end portion of the pressing frame **201**. The controller **140** (CPU) controls a motor **210** to rotate the pressure-releasing cam **205** about a rotation shaft **205***a*, thus raising and lowering the rotation end portion of the pressing frame **201**. When the pressure-releasing cam **205** is spaced from the pressing frame **201**, the pressing spring **204** presses down the rotation end portion of the pressing frame **201**, so that the externally heating belt **105** is press-contacted to the fixing roller **101**. When the pressure-releasing cam **205** compresses the pressing spring **204** to press up the pressing frame **201**, the externally heating belt **105** is spaced from the fixing roller **101**.

As shown in (a) of FIG. **4**, front-side end portions of the upstream roller **103** and the downstream roller **104** are supported by a roller holding frame **206***a* functioning as a supporting portion, and rear-side end portions of the upstream roller **103** and the downstream roller **104** are supported by a roller holding frame **206***b*. Further, as shown in (b) of FIG. **4**, the front-side roller holding frame **206***a* is rotatably supported by supporting shafts **207***a* and **207***b* relative to the swinging frame **208** functioning as a supporting portion. Similarly, the rear-side roller holding frame **206***b* is rotatably supported by supporting shafts **207***c* and **207***d* relative to the swinging frame **208**. The roller holding frame **206***a* rotatably shaft-supports the front-side end portions of the upstream roller **103** and the downstream roller **104** via unshown heat-resistant bush and bearing. Similarly, the roller holding frame **206***b* rotatably shaft-supports the rear-side end portions of the upstream roller **103** and the downstream roller **104** via unshown heat-resistant bush and bearing.

The pressing spring **204** is disposed at each of longitudinal end portions of the pressing frame **201** functioning as a holding portion. The pair of pressing springs **204** causes the externally heating belt **105** to press-contact the outer peripheral surface of the fixing roller **101** at predetermined pressure via the upstream roller **103** and the downstream roller **104**. As shown in FIG. **3**, a rectilinear line connecting the supporting shafts **207** (**207***a*, **207***b*, **207***c*, **207***d*) and the center of the fixing roller **101** constitutes a perpendicular bisector of a rectilinear line connecting the centers of the upstream roller **103** and the downstream roller **104** in a state in which the externally heating belt **105** is intimately contacted to the fixing roller **101**.

As shown in FIG. **5**, when detection that the externally heating belt **105** is out of a normal traveling zone (predetermined zone) with respect to a widthwise direction of the externally heating belt **105** is made by a belt position sensor described later, control is effected so that the externally heating belt **105** is returned into the normal traveling zone. That is, the upstream roller **103** and the downstream roller **104** which are in a state in which the rollers **103** and **104** press the externally heating belt **105** against the fixing roller **101** are tilted (rotated) about a tilt (rotation) center **209**. As a result, a rotational axis direction of these rollers has a crossing angle θ with respect to a generatrix of the fixing roller **101**. Further, when the rollers are placed in such a state, at the rear-side end portions, one of the upstream roller **103** and the downstream roller **104** starts pressure application to the fixing roller **101** ahead of the other. At the same time, at the front-side end portions, the other one of the upstream roller **103** and the downstream roller **104** starts pressure application to the fixing roller **101***a* ahead of one of the rollers (another roller). At this time, a pressure difference between the upstream roller **103** and the downstream roller **104** autonomously rotates the front-side roller holding frame **206***a* and the rear-side roller holding frame **206***b* to cancel an end portion pressure difference between the upstream roller **103** and the downstream roller **104**. The front-side roller holding frame **206***a* and the rear-side roller holding frame **206***b* are rotated relative to each other to determine positions of the upstream roller **103** and the downstream roller **104** at tilt positions depending on a curved surface of the fixing roller **101**. A relative tilt angle between the upstream roller **103** and the downstream roller **104** varies freely, and therefore attitudes of the upstream roller **103** and the downstream **104** are autonomously corrected to the tilt positions depending on the curved surface of the fixing roller **101**, so that the externally heating belt **105** is closely contacted to the fixing roller **101**. Both of the upstream roller **103** and the downstream roller **104** are uniformly pressed, so that not only in the front side but also in the rear side, sufficient heating is made from the upstream roller **103** and the downstream roller **104** to the fixing roller **101** via the externally heating belt **105**.

(Steering Mechanism)

FIG. **6** is an illustration of a steering mechanism functioning as a tilting (rotating) portion for swinging the externally heating belt in a widthwise direction of the externally heating belt. FIG. **7** is an illustration of a driving portion of the steering mechanism. FIG. **8** is an enlarged view of the driving portion of the steering mechanism.

As shown in FIG. **5**, the externally heating belt **105** is capable be being laterally deviated (shifted) and moved in an axial direction of the upstream and downstream rollers **103** and **104** (in a widthwise direction of the belt **105**) with rotation thereof by rotation of the fixing roller **101**. The cause of this lateral deviation movement is a deviation of parallelism between the upstream roller **103** and the downstream roller **104**, and the like. Therefore, in this embodiment, as described above, the crossing angle θ is provided.

Specifically, by providing the crossing angle θ between the externally heating belt **105** and the fixing roller **101**, steering control such that a direction of the lateral deviation movement of the externally heating belt **105** is inverted to cause a lateral deviation movement range of the externally heating belt **105** to fall within a predetermined angle range is executed. In this embodiment, the crossing angle θ is controlled within an angle range of ±1.25 degrees on the basis of a reference angle (zero degrees) as an angle at the time when a direction of a generatrix of the fixing roller **101** and an axial direction of the two rollers **103** and **104** are substantially in parallel with each other.

As shown in FIG. **6**, the fixing roller **101** is rotatably supported by main assembly side plates **202** as an example of a supporting casing. The externally heating belt **105** is rotated by the rotation of the fixing roller **101** while forming a contact surface (heating portion) between the externally heating belt **105** and the fixing roller **101**. The upstream roller **103** and the downstream roller **104** which are a plurality of supporting rollers (supporting portions) stretch the externally heating belt **105**.

The pressing frame **201** functioning as the holding portion is detachably mounted between the main assembly side plates **202**. The pressing frame **201** rotatably supports the upstream and downstream rollers **103** and **104** as a unit so as to form the crossing angle θ between the generatrix of the fixing roller **101** and the generatrix the externally heating belt **105** (i.e., the rotational axis of the rollers **103** and **104**) at the contact surface.

The swingable frame **208** functioning as the supporting portion rotatably supports the upstream and downstream rollers **103** and **104**, and is rotatably supported by the pressing frame **201** so as to provide the crossing angle θ. The pressing frame **201**, the swingable frame **208**, the upstream roller **103**, the downstream roller **104** and the externally heating belt **105** are integrally assembled to constitute the externally heating unit **150**.

A worm wheel **118** functioning as a tilting (rotating) portion tilts the swingable frame **208** relative to the pressing frame **201**, i.e., rotates a lower portion **150**L (FIG. **12**) of the externally heating unit **150** relative to an upper portion **150**U (FIG. **12**). The controller **140** controls an operation of the worm wheel **118** to control the lateral deviation movement of the externally heating belt **105** along the upstream roller **103** and the downstream roller **104**.

The controller **140** tilts, as a unit, about a rotation shaft (swinging shaft) **209**, the upstream roller **103** and the downstream roller **104** which stretch the externally heating belt **105** to intentionally set the crossing angle θ between the externally heating belt **105** and the fixing roller **101**, thus controlling the lateral deviation direction of the externally heating belt **105**. The rotation shaft (swinging shaft) **209** is a rotation center (swinging center) for changing the crossing angle θ between the externally heating belt **105** and the fixing roller **101**. The rotation shaft **209** is a shaft portion extending in substantially parallel to a direction of a normal to a flat surface (upper surface of FIG. **3**), of the externally heating belt **105** in a side remote from the fixing roller **101**, of surfaces of the externally heating belt **105** located belt the two rollers (**103**, **104**). The supporting shaft **203** of the pressing frame **201** is fixed between the main assembly side plates **202** at ends thereof. The swinging frame **208** and the externally heating belt **105** are rotatable as a unit, relative to the pressing frame **201**, about the rotation shaft **209**. The supporting shaft **207***a* fixed on the swinging frame **208** is held with a clearance from the main assembly side plate **202**, and is movable in arrow H and J directions, in a clearance range, with movement of an arm portion **118***a* of the worm wheel **118**.

The sector worm wheel **118** rotatable about the rotation shaft **119** is engaged with a worm gear **120**. When the motor **125** is rotated in a normal direction to rotate the worm wheel **118** in an arrow G, the arm portion **118***a* is moved in the arrow H direction to move the supporting shaft **207***a* in the arrow H direction. When the motor **125** is rotated in a reverse direction to rotate the worm wheel **118** in an arrow I direction, the arm portion **118***a* is moved in the arrow J direction to move the supporting shaft **207***a* in the arrow J direction (FIGS. **7** and **8**).

When the swinging frame **208** is moved in the arrow H or J direction in the front side, the upstream roller **103** and the downstream roller **104** are rotated around the rotation shaft **209**, so that the crossing angle θ is set between the fixing roller **101** and the upstream and downstream rollers **103** and **104**. There is a relationship the crossing angle θ between the fixing roller **101** and the externally heating belt **105** and a lateral deviation (shift) speed of the externally heating belt **105**. A lateral deviation force of the externally heating belt **105** is changed depending on an amount of movement of the arm portion **118***a*, so that a direction and speed of the lateral deviation (movement) of the externally heating belt **105** along the upstream and downstream rollers **103** and **104** are controlled.

In the case where the supporting shaft **207***a* is moved from a point where the shift force is zero to the H direction, the shift force for moving the externally heating belt **105** toward the rear side (arrow M direction) of the fixing roller **101** becomes large. In the case where the supporting shaft **207***a* is moved from the point where the shift force is zero to the J direction, the shift force for moving the externally heating belt **105** toward the front side (arrow L direction) of the fixing roller **101** becomes large. In this way, by moving the supporting shaft **207***a* in the arrow H and J directions, a direction in which the externally heating belt **105** is shifted can be controlled.

(Belt Position Sensor)

FIG. **9** is an illustration of an arrangement of a belt position sensor as a detecting portion. Parts (a) and (b) of FIG. **10** are illustrations each showing a relationship between a belt lateral deviation direction and a sensor flag rotational direction.

As shown in FIG. **9**, the belt position sensor principally includes, as constituent elements thereof, a roller **128** contacted to a widthwise edge of the externally heating belt **105**, an arm **129** connected with the roller **128**, a sensor flag **132** connected with the arm **129**, and photo-interrupters **133** and **134** for detecting a rotation position of the sensor flag **132**. Description will be made specifically below.

The arm **129** and the roller **128** rotate as a unit about a rotation shaft **136**. The sensor flag **132** rotates about a rotation shaft **137**. The arm **129** and the sensor flag **132** are engaged by a link portion **138** to transmit a rotational force. The roller **128** contacts a belt edge of the externally heating belt **105**. A torsion spring **131** as an urging portion urges the roller **128** in an arrow Q direction by applying a torque to the arm **129**. For that reason, when the externally heating belt **105** is shifted (laterally deviated) in the arrow Q direction, the link portion **138** is moved in an arrow P direction so as to follow the shifted externally heating belt **105**. On the other hand, when the externally heating belt **105** is shifted in an arrow R direction, similarly, the link portion **138** is moved in an arrow O direction.

Along the sensor flag **132**, photo-interruptors **133** and **134** are provided. The photo-interruptors **133** and **134** detect four edges of the two slits SL**1** and SL**2** formed in the sensor flag **132** and invert outputs of the detection. Correspondingly to the four edges of the sensor flag **132**, lateral deviation positions of the externally heating belt **105** are defined. As an example, the photo-interruptors **133** and **134** are disposed so that the externally heating belt **105** repeats the lateral deviation movement with an amplitude of 5 mm.

As shown in (a) of FIG. **10**, in the case where the externally heating belt **105** is shifted in the arrow R direction, the arm **129** is rotated in an arrow S direction, so that the sensor flag **132** is rotated in an arrow T direction to turn off the photo-interruptor **133** and to turn on the photo-interruptor **134**. As shown in (b) of FIG. **10**, in the case where the externally heating belt **105** is shifted in the arrow Q direction, the arm **129** is rotated in an arrow U direction, so that the sensor flag **132** is rotated in an arrow V direction to turn on the photo-interruptor **133** and to turn off the photo-interruptor **134**.

(Comparison Example)

Part (a) of FIG. **11** is an illustration of rotation of a swingable frame of a fixing device in Comparison example. As shown in (a) of FIG. **11**, in a fixing device **9**H in Comparison example, a swingable frame **208** is rotatable about a rotation shaft **209** relative to a pressing frame **201** similarly as in Embodiment 1. For this reason, when the pressing frame **201** is demounted from and mounted into a casing of the fixing device **9**H, the swingable frame **208** is rotated, and thus can contact peripheral parts. For that reason, when an externally heating unit **150**H is assembled with the casing of the fixing device **9**H, an attitude of the swingable frame **208** is not fixed, so that there is a fear that the swingable frame **208** constitute an obstacle to a mounting operation of the externally heating unit **150**H.

In an exchanging (replacing) operation of the externally heating unit **150**H, the demounted externally heating unit **150**H is placed on a table in a state in which a surface of the pressing frame **201** is directed downward. In this state, when a roller holding frame **206** in a side is demounted, the externally heating belt **105** is capable of being pulled out along the upstream and downstream rollers **103** and **104**.

In Comparison example, in the case where the externally heating belt **105** is replaced, the swingable frame **208** can be rotated with no limitation, and therefore it takes much time to demount and mount the externally heating belt **105**. In a state in which the externally heating unit **150**H can be rotated with no limitation, a position of the roller frame **206** is not stabilized, and therefore the roller holding frame **206** constitutes an obstacle to the exchanging operation of the externally heating belt **105**.

Therefore, in Embodiment 1, the externally heating unit **150** is provided with a limiting mechanism for preventing (limiting) rotation of the swingable frame **208** so that an angle of rotation is less than a predetermined angle. When the externally heating unit **150** is assembled with the casing of the fixing device **9**, the rotation of the swingable frame **208** will fall within a certain range, and as a result, the assembling of the externally heating unit **150** with the casing of the fixing device **9** is facilitated.

(Limiting Mechanism)

FIG. **12** is an illustration of a structure of an externally heating unit. FIG. **13** is an illustration of a structure of a pressing frame. FIG. **14** is an illustration of a structure of the swingable frame. Parts (a), (b) and (c) of FIG. **15** are illustrations of tilt (rotation) limitation of the swingable frame. FIG. **16** is an illustration of a relationship between a crossing angle and tilt limit angle.

As shown in FIG. **12**, a rotatable limiting member **211** functioning as a limiting portion limits, in a state in which the externally heating unit **150** is demounted from the main assembly side plates **202**, a tilt (rotation) angle of the swingable frame **208** relative to the pressing frame **201** within a predetermined angle range (within ±4 degrees in this embodiment). The rotatable limiting member **211** is a mechanism for providing the tilt angle of the swingable frame **208** relative to the pressing frame **201** with a limit within the predetermined angle range. As shown in FIG. **16**, a tolerable angle range β (4 degrees in this embodiment) by the rotatable limiting member **211** includes therein an angle range (θ in FIG. **5**) αmax (1.25 degrees) in which the swingable frame **208** is capable of crossing within an axis of the pressing frame **201** by the steering mechanism. Here, a broken line O in FIG. **16** shows a state in which the externally heating belt **105** does not substantially cross with the fixing roller **101** as described above, i.e., a state in which the rotational axis of the two rollers **103** and **104** is substantially in parallel to the rotation axis (generatrix) of the fixing roller **101**.

As shown in FIG. **12**, the externally heating unit **150** is roughly divided into the upper portion **150**U including the pressing frame **201** and the lower portion **150**L including the externally heating belt **105** and the swingable frame **208**. As shown in FIG. **6**, the externally heating unit **150** is supported rotatably by the supporting shaft **203** between the main assembly side plates **202** of the fixing device **9**.

The lower portion **150**L of the externally heating unit **150** is supported by the rotation shaft **209** so as to be hung from the pressing frame **201**, thus being rotatable about the rotation shaft **209** relative to the upper portion **150**U. Even when the lower portion **150**L is rotated relative to the upper portion **150**U, a parallel relationship between the fixing device **9** and the pressing frame **201** is kept constant, and at the same time, a parallel relationship of the swingable frame **208** with the upstream and downstream rollers **103** and **104** is kept constant.

As shown in FIG. **13**, on a lower surface of the pressing frame **201**, the rotatable limiting member **211** is fixed.

As shown in FIG. **14**, at an upper surface of the swingable frame **208**, each of side surfaces **208***a* and **208***b* in a tilt (rotation) center region of the swingable frame **208** is projected outward in a trapezoidal shape by drawing a metal plate material.

As shown in (a) of FIG. **15**, the swingable frame **208** is rotatable about the rotation shaft **209** relative to the pressing frame **201** as indicated by arrows. However, the rotatable limiting member **211** of the pressing frame **201** enters an inside of the side surfaces **208***a* and **208***b*. For this reason, a tilt (rotation) range of the swingable frame **208** relative to the pressing frame **201** is limited by a tilt (rotation) angle at which the rotatable limiting member **211** abuts against inner wall surfaces of the side surfaces **208***a* and **208***b*.

As shown in (b) of FIG. **15**, in the case where the swingable frame **208** is rotated counterclockwise as seen from above, the side surface **208***a* of the swingable frame **208** contacts the rotatable limiting member **211** to constitute a stopper, so that the rotation (tilting) of the swingable frame **208** is limited.

As shown in (c) of FIG. **15**, in the case where the swingable frame **208** is rotated clockwise as seen from above, the side surface **208***b* of the swingable frame **208** contacts the rotatable limiting member **211** to constitute a stopper, so that the rotation (tilting) of the swingable frame **208** is limited.

As shown in FIG. **5**, the crossing angle, between the fixing roller **101** and the externally heating belt **105**, used when the direction of the lateral deviation movement of the externally heating belt **105** is inverted is ±θ (±1.25 degrees in this embodiment). Further, in the case where the direction of the lateral deviation movement is not inverted by the inversion at the crossing angle θ, in order to obviate complete lateral deviation (movement), a crossing angle of ±θmax (±2.5 degrees) set at a value which is twice the crossing angle of ±e is employed.

As shown in FIG. **16**, an angle formed between the swingable frame **208** and the pressing frame **201** in a state in which the swingable frame **208** is limited by the rotatable limiting member **211** is taken as β. In Embodiment 1, the tilt angle between the swingable frame **208** and the pressing frame **201** is limited by the tilt angle β larger than α which is twice the crossing angle θmax, so that the swingable frame **208** is prevented from being rotated (tilted) further.

$$\beta \geq \alpha max$$

In this embodiment, the angle β varies depending on component tolerance, and therefore β>αmax is used as a design value. In the case where the angle β is smaller than αmax, in the lateral deviation control of the externally heating belt **105**, the swingable frame **208** cannot be rotated to the angle of

±θmax, so that the rotation of the swingable frame **208** is stopped at the angle β. In Embodiment 1, αmax is 2 degrees and β is 4 degrees.

The rotatable limiting member **211** contacts the swingable frame **208** in the neighborhood of the rotation shaft **209**, so that the rotation (tilting) of the externally heating unit **150** as a whole is limited. However, in order to decrease a degree of the influence on the tilt angle β due to variation in dimension at a position of the contact surface, it is desirable that a portion for limiting torsion of the externally heating unit at a position remote from the central rotation shaft **209** is provided.

In this embodiment, in a constitution in which heat is supplied to the fixing roller **101** by using the externally heating belt **105**, the rotation shaft **209** is provided in the externally heating unit **150** to change the crossing angle θ, so that the lateral deviation movement of the externally heating belt **105** is controlled. At that time, the rotatable limiting member **211** for limiting the rotation of the externally heating belt **105** is provided, so that the assembling of the externally heating unit **150** with the fixing device **9** is facilitated.

In this embodiment, the rotatable limiting member **211** contacts the side surfaces **208***a* and **208***b* of the swingable frame **208**, so that the rotation of the swingable frame **208** relative to the pressing frame **201** is limited and thus a deflection angle of the externally heating unit **150** is limited. In this way, by setting a tilt (rotation) limit angle is set, so that the control of the lateral deviation movement of the externally heating belt **105** is prevented from being influenced by the reflection angle of the externally heating unit **150**.

In this embodiment, when the externally heating unit **150** is raised alone, the swingable frame **208** is not largely rotated, and therefore an operation for mounting the externally heating unit **150** between the main assembly side plates **202** of the fixing device **9** is easy. By mounting the externally heating unit **150** in a state in which the attitude of the externally heating belt **105** is fixed, different from Comparison example shown in FIG. **11**, a position relationship between the externally heating unit **150** and the main assembly side plates **202** is not largely destroyed. For this reason, a possibility of contact between parts when the shaft **207***a* is engaged into the arm portion **118***a* becomes small.

In this embodiment, in the externally heating unit **150**, a maximum tilt angle is limited between a portion, to be fixed between the main assembly side plates **202**, for holding the fixing roller **101** and a portion, disposed rotatably relative to the portion, for holding the externally heating belt **105**. By making the limited angle larger than an angle used during the lateral deviation control, the influence on the lateral deviation control of the externally heating belt **105** is eliminated.

In this embodiment, in order to effect the lateral deviation control of the externally heating belt **105**, although a constitution in which the externally heating belt **105** itself is twisted is employed, the attitude of the externally heating belt **105** is fixed when the externally heating unit **150** is mounted between the main assembly side plates **202**. For this reason, the mounting of the externally heating unit **150** is easy. The rotation is limited to an angle larger than a maximum of the torsional angle used in the lateral deviation control of the externally heating belt **105**, and therefore the lateral deviation control of the externally heating belt **105** is not adversely affected.

(Embodiment 2)

FIG. **17** is a front view of a demounted state of an externally heating unit in Embodiment 2. FIG. **18** is a plan view of the demounted state of the externally heating unit in this embodiment. FIG. **19** is a front view of a mounted state of the externally heating unit in this embodiment. FIG. **20** is a plan view of the mounted state of the externally heating unit in this embodiment.

As shown in (b) of FIG. **11**, in Embodiment 1, the rotation of the externally heating unit **150** is limited, but the externally heating unit **150** is still rotatable (tiltable) within a limited range, and therefore there is a fear that the rotation of the externally heating unit **150** constitute an obstacle to positioning of the supporting shaft **207***a* relative to the arm portion **118***a*.

Therefore, in this embodiment, as shown in FIG. **17**, in addition to the constitution of Embodiment 1, a lock mechanism **160** for stopping the rotation (tilting) of the swingable frame **208** by being actuated with mounting and demounting of the externally heating unit **150** was provided. In Embodiment 2, the constitution except for the lock mechanism **160** is the same as the constitution in Embodiment 1, and therefore in FIGS. **17** to **20**, constituent elements common to Embodiments 1 and 2 are represented by the same reference numerals or symbols and will be omitted from redundant description.

As shown in FIG. **19**, the lock mechanism **160** as the lateral deviation is a mechanism for limiting the rotation of the swingable frame **208** relative to the pressing frame **201** with a demounting operation of the pressing frame **201** as an example of a predetermined part (component). The pressing frame **201** is one of parts to be demounted for removing, from between the main assembly side plates **202**, the pressing frame **201**, the swingable frame **208**, the upstream roller **103**, the downstream roller **104** and the externally heating belt **105**. The lock mechanism **160** eliminates limitation of the tilting of the swingable frame **208** relative to the pressing frame **201** with the mounting operation of the pressing frame **201**.

A fixing cover **214** is an example of the predetermined part or a part of which position is fixed relative to the predetermined part. A rotation stopping member **213** as an example of a lever member is shaft-supported by the pressing frame **201** and is contactable to the swingable frame **208** at an rotation end thereof. An elastic member **212** as an example of an urging means urges the rotation stopping member **213** in a direction in which the rotation and is contacted to the swingable frame **208**. In a state in which the pressing frame **201** is mounted between the main assembly side plates **202**, the fixing member **214** rotates the rotation stopping member **213** against the urging by the elastic member **212**, so that the rotation end is spaced from the swingable frame **208**.

As shown in FIG. **17**, the lock mechanism **160** is disposed on the pressing frame **201** of the externally heating unit **150**. The lock mechanism **160** supports the rotation stopping member **213** rotatably about a rotation shaft **213***b*. The rotation stopping member **213** is urged toward the swingable frame **208** by the elastic member **212** which is a torsion spring. The lock mechanism **160** fixes, in the case of the externally heating unit **150** alone, relative rotation between the swingable frame **208** and the pressing frame **201** to improve an exchanging property of the externally heating belt **105** alone.

As shown in FIG. **18**, the roller holding frame **206** holds the supporting rollers **103** and **104** by which the externally heating belt **105** is stretched. The roller holding frame **206** is in a torsional relationship with the pressing frame **201** via the swingable frame **208**. The rotation stopping member **213** is disposed at two positions in front and rear sides of the rotation shaft **209** with respect to the longitudinal direction of the externally heating unit **150**. In a state in which the externally heating unit **150** is demounted from the fixing device **9**, the rotation stopping member **213** urged by the elastic member **212** contacts the swingable frame **208** to stop the rotation of the swingable frame **208** relative to the pressing frame **201**. The lock mechanism **160** prevents torsion between the pressing frame **201** and the swingable frame **208** to fix a positional relationship therebetween.

As shown in FIG. **19**, the lock mechanism **160** eliminates fixing of relative rotation between the swingable frame **208** and the pressing frame **201** when the externally heating unit **150** is mounted between the main assembly side plates **202** of the fixing device **9**, so that the lateral deviation movement control of the externally heating belt **105** is enabled. In a process in which the externally heating unit **150** is assembled into the fixing device **9**, a projected portion **215** disposed on the fixing cover **214** of the fixing device **9** pushes the rotation stopping member **213** to rotate the rotation stopping member **213**.

As shown in FIG. **20**, when the lock mechanism **160** is released, the rotation stopping member **213** is retracted from the swingable frame **208**, so that the swingable frame **208** is rotatable relative to the pressing frame **201**.

In Embodiment 2, in the case of the externally heating unit **150** alone, the swingable frame **208** and the pressing frame **201** are fixed, and when the externally heating unit **150** is mounted in the fixing device **9**, the swingable frame **208** is rotatable relative to the pressing frame **201**. For this reason, different from a lock mechanism to be manually operated, there is no need to perform manual locking and release of the manual locking.

In this embodiment, the lock mechanism **160** is added, and therefore compared with Embodiment 1, there is a demerit such that the constitution is complicated and thus a cost is increased. However, the lock mechanism **160** prevents the torsion between the swingable frame **208** and the pressing frame **201** in the case of the externally heating unit **150** alone, and therefore the exchanging property of the externally heating belt **105** is improved compared with Embodiment 1. When the externally heating unit **150** is mounted on the table with the pressing frame **201** downward, the upstream roller **103** and the downstream roller **104** are rotated and are not deviated, and therefore the operation property when the externally heating belt **105** is replaced is improved compared with Embodiment 1.

The lock mechanism **160** in this embodiment may also be used singly without being combined with the rotatable limiting member **211** in Embodiment 1. The lock mechanism **160** is not limited to a mechanism for controlling locking and release of the locking by urging the lever against the projection of the fixing cover. The lock mechanism **160** may also be substituted with a mechanism for locking the swingable frame **208** with the demounting operation of the externally heating unit **150** from between the main assembly side plates **202**.

In the above, Embodiments 1 and 2 to which the present invention is applied are described, but within the range of the concept of the present invention, a part or all of the constitutions described in Embodiments 1 and 2 can be substituted with alternative constitutions thereof.

For example, the heating mechanism (heater) for the fixing roller and the externally heating belt is not limited to the halogen heater but may also be replaced with a mechanism for heating through electromagnetic induction heating by providing an exciting coil.

Further, the rotatable heating member to be heated by the externally heating belt is not limited to the fixing roller but may also be the pressing roller.

The image heating apparatus includes, in addition to the fixing device, a surface heating apparatus for adjusting image gloss and a surface property of a partly or completely fixed image, and includes a curl removing apparatus of the recording material on which the fixed image is formed. The image heating apparatus may also be, other than in the constitution in which the image heating apparatus is assembled with the image forming apparatus, carried out as a single apparatus or component which is disposed and operated alone. The image forming apparatus can be carried irrespective of types of monochromatic/full-color, sheet-feeding/recording material conveyance intermediary transfer, toner image formation, and toner image transfer. The present invention can be carried out in the image forming apparatuses in various fields, such as printers, various printing machines, copying machines, facsimile machines and multi-function machines, by adding a device, equipment and a casing structure which are necessary for the image heating apparatus.

Further, in Embodiments 1 and 2, as an example to which the present invention is applied, the image heating apparatus (fixing device) is described, but, e.g., the present invention is similarly applicable to also the following constitution.

For example, the present invention is applicable to a constitution in which an endless intermediary transfer belt as the intermediary transfer member is used. In this constitution, the intermediary transfer belt is configured to be rotatable by two supporting rollers so as to be rotated by rotation of the photosensitive member, and such intermediary transfer belt and two supporting rollers are disposed to cross as a unit with the generatrix direction (axial direction) of the photosensitive member similarly as in the above-described embodiments. In this way, the present invention can be similarly applied as a lateral deviation mechanism for the intermediary transfer belt. In addition, the present invention is also applicable to an endless belt, to be provided in the image forming apparatus, configured to be rotatably supported at an inner surface thereof by two supporting rollers so as to be rotated by rotation of a rotatable driving member. In this case, the endless belt and the two supporting rollers are constituted to cross as a unit with the generatrix direction (axial direction) of the rotatable driving member.

While the invention has been described with reference to the structures disclosed herein, it is not confined to the details set forth and this application is intended to cover such modifications or changes as may come within the purpose of the improvements or the scope of the following claims.

This application claims priority from Japanese Patent Application No. 263768/2012 filed Nov. 30, 2012, which is hereby incorporated by reference.

What is claimed is:

1. An image heating apparatus comprising:

a rotatable heating member configured to heat an image on a sheet;

a belt unit including an endless belt configured to heat said rotatable heating member by contacting an outer surface of said rotatable heating member, and first and second supporting members configured to rotatably support an inner surface of said endless belt;

a holding mechanism configured to rotatably hold said belt unit;

a detector configured to detect that said endless belt is out of a predetermined zone with respect to a widthwise direction of said endless belt;

a tilting device configured to tilt said belt unit relative to said holding mechanism in a direction of causing said endless belt to return into the predetermined zone on the basis of an output of said detector; and

a limiting mechanism configured to limit tilting of said belt unit to an angle exceeding a predetermined angle range wider than an angle range in which said belt unit is capable of being tilted by said tilting device.

2. An image heating apparatus according to claim **1**, wherein said limiting mechanism is provided on said holding mechanism.

3. An image heating apparatus according to claim **1**, wherein each of said first and second supporting members is a roller in which a heater is incorporated.

4. An image heating apparatus according to claim **1**, further comprising

a driving mechanism configured to rotationally drive said rotatable heating member,

wherein said endless belt is constituted so as to be rotated by rotation of said rotatable heating member.

5. An image heating apparatus according to claim **1**, wherein said rotatable heating member is a roller.

6. An image heating apparatus according to claim **1**, further comprising a nip forming member configured to form a nip for nipping and conveying the sheet between said nip forming member and said rotatable heating member.

7. An image heating apparatus comprising:

a rotatable heating member configured to heat a toner image on a sheet;

a belt unit including an endless belt configured to heat said rotatable heating member by contacting an outer surface of said rotatable heating member, and first and second rollers configured to rotatably support an inner surface of said endless belt;

a detector configured to detect a widthwise position of said endless belt;

a tilting device configured to tilt, on the basis of an output of said detector, said belt unit so that an axis of each of said first and second rollers in a state in which said rollers press said endless belt against said rotatable heating member crosses with a generatrix of said rotatable heating member; and

a limiting mechanism configured to limit tilting of said belt unit to an angle exceeding a predetermined angle range wider than an angle range of said belt unit tilted by said tilting device.

8. An image heating apparatus according to claim **7**, wherein said limiting mechanism is provided on said holding mechanism.

9. An image heating apparatus according to claim **7**, wherein each of said first and second rollers includes a heater incorporated therein.

10. An image heating apparatus according to claim **7**, further comprising a driving mechanism configured to rotationally drive said rotatable heating member,

wherein said endless belt is constituted so as to be rotated by rotation of said rotatable heating member.

11. An image heating apparatus according to claim **7**, wherein said rotatable heating member is a roller.

12. An image heating apparatus according to claim **7**, further comprising a nip forming member configured to form a nip for nipping and conveying the sheet between said nip forming member and said rotatable heating member.

13. An image heating apparatus comprising:

a rotatable heating member configured to heat a toner image on a sheet;

an endless belt configured to heat said rotatable heating member by contacting an outer surface of said rotatable heating member;

two rollers configured to rotatably support an inner surface of said endless belt;

a supporting mechanism configured to support said two rollers;

a holding mechanism configured to swingably hold said supporting mechanism;

a detector configured to detect a widthwise position of said endless belt;

a swinging device configured to swing, on the basis of an output of said detector, said supporting mechanism relative to said holding mechanism so that each of said two rollers in a state in which said two rollers press said endless belt against said rotatable heating member crosses with said rotatable heating member; and

a limiting mechanism configured to limit swinging of said supporting mechanism relative to said holding mechanism to an angle exceeding a predetermined angle range wider than an angle range in which said belt unit is capable of being swung by said swinging device.

14. An image heating apparatus according to claim **13**, wherein said swinging device is provided on an opposite side from said rotatable heating member with respect to said endless belt and has a swinging shaft which is positioned between said two rollers and which is substantially parallel to a direction of normal to a flat surface of said endless belt in a side remote from said rotatable heating member, and

wherein said swinging device swings said holding mechanism about the swinging shaft on the basis of an output of said detector.

15. An image heating apparatus comprising:

a rotatable heating member configured to heat an image on a sheet;

a belt unit including an endless belt configured to heat said rotatable heating member by contacting an outer surface of said rotatable heating member, and first and second supporting members configured to rotatably support an inner surface of said endless belt;

a detector configured to detect that said endless belt is out of a predetermined zone with respect to a widthwise direction of said endless belt;

a tilting device configured to tilt said belt unit in a direction of causing said endless belt to return into the predetermined zone on the basis of an output of said detector; and

a limiting mechanism configured to limit tilting of said belt unit.

16. An image heating apparatus according to claim **15**, wherein said tilting device tilts said belt unit within a predetermined angle range about a predetermined tilt center, and

wherein said limiting mechanism-limits the tilting of said belt unit to an angle exceeding an angle range wider than the predetermined angle range.

17. An image forming apparatus comprising:

a belt unit including an endless belt and first and second supporting members configured to rotatably support an inner surface of said endless belt;

a rotatable driving member configured to rotate said endless belt by rotation thereof in contact with an outer surface of said endless belt;

a holding mechanism configured to rotatably hold said belt unit;

a detector configured to detect that said endless belt is out of a predetermined zone with respect to a widthwise direction of said endless belt;

a tilting device configured to tilt said belt unit relative to said holding mechanism in a direction of causing said endless belt to return into the predetermined zone on the basis of an output of said detector; and

a limiting mechanism configured to limit tilting of said belt unit to an angle exceeding a predetermined angle range wider than an angle range in which said belt unit is capable of being tilted by said tilting device.

18. An image forming apparatus comprising:

a belt unit including an endless belt and first and second rollers configured to rotatably support an inner surface of said endless belt;

a rotatable driving member configured to rotate said endless belt by rotation thereof in contact with an outer surface of said endless belt;

a holding mechanism configured to rotatably hold said belt unit;

a detector configured to detect a widthwise position of said endless belt;

a tilting device configured to tilt, on the basis of an output of said detector, said belt unit relative to said holding mechanism so that an axis of each of said first and second rollers in a state in which said first and second rollers press said endless belt against said rotatable heating member crosses with a generatrix of said rotatable heating member; and

a limiting mechanism configured to limit tilting of said belt unit to an angle exceeding a predetermined angle range wider than an angle range in which said belt unit is capable of being tilted by said tilting device.

19. An image heating apparatus comprising:

an endless belt;

two rollers configured to rotatably support an inner surface of said endless belt;

a rotatable driving member configured to rotate said endless belt by rotation thereof in contact with an outer surface of said endless belt;

a supporting mechanism configured to support said two rollers;

a holding mechanism configured to swingably hold said supporting mechanism;

a detector configured to detect a widthwise position of said endless belt;

a swinging device configured to swing, on the basis of an output of said detector, said supporting mechanism relative to said holding mechanism so that said each of said two rollers in a state in which said two rollers press said endless belt against said rotatable heating member crosses with said rotatable heating member; and

a limiting mechanism configured to limit swinging of said supporting mechanism relative to said holding mechanism to an angle exceeding a predetermined angle range wider than an angle range in which said belt unit is capable of being swung by said swinging device.

20. An image heating apparatus according to claim 19, wherein said swinging device is provided on an opposite side from said rotatable driving member with respect to said endless belt and has a swinging shaft which is positioned between said two rollers and which is substantially parallel to a direction of normal to a flat surface of said endless belt in a side remote from said rotatable driving member, and

wherein said swinging device swings said supporting mechanism about the swinging shaft on the basis of an output of said detector.

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